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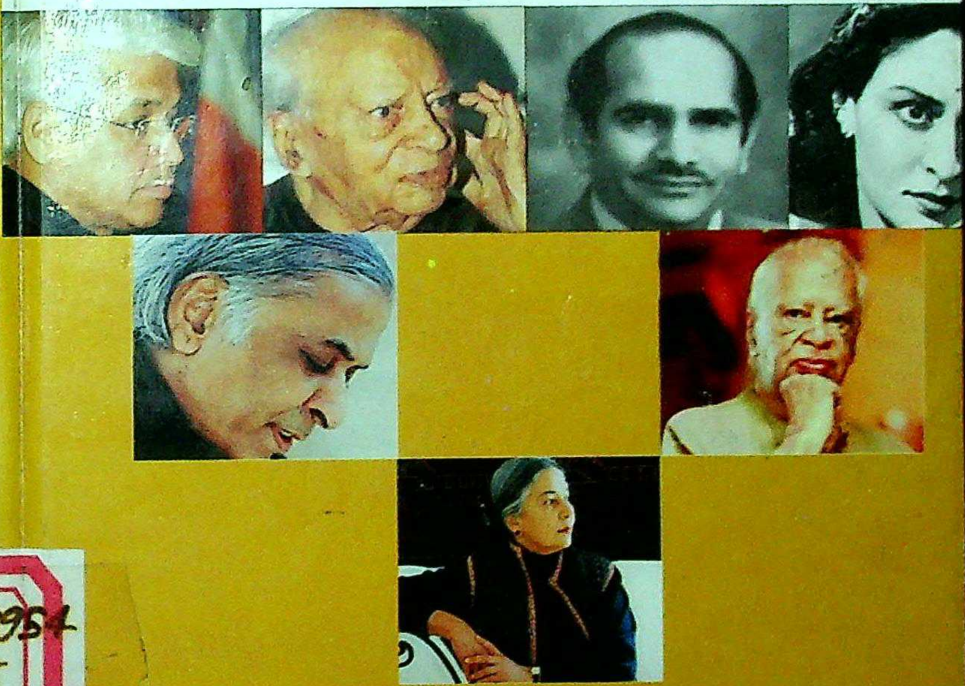
ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF INDIAN ENGLISH CRITICISM

(Set of 7 Volumes)



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ENCYCLOPAEDIA
OF
INDIAN ENGLISH CRITICISM

(RAJA RAO: A CRITICAL STUDY)

Vol. 7

Editor

Dr. S. K. Mittal
Raj Shekhar

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PREFACE

Indian English literature is an endeavour of showcasing the rare gems of Indian writing in English. From being a curious native explosion, Indian English has become a new form of Indian culture and voice in which India speaks. While Indian authors, poets, novelists, essayists, dramatists have been making significant contributions to world literature since the pre-Independence era, the past few years have seen a massive flourishing of Indian English writing in the international market. Not only are the works of Indian authors writing in English soaring on the best-seller list, they are also receiving a great deal of critical acclaim. Starting from Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Toru Dutt to Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Allan Sealy, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Chandra ... the parade of fine Indian writers is long and lengthening.

Present-day India boasts an English-language literature of energy and diversity and has spawned a striking literary diaspora. Some writers of Indian descent (V. S. Naipaul , Bharati Mukherjee) now reject the ethnic label of 'Indian writers'. Mukherjee sees herself as American, while Naipaul would perhaps prefer to be read as an artist from nowhere and everywhere. For some Indian critics, English-language Indian writing is a post-colonial anomaly; its continuing use of the old colonial tongue is seen as a fatal flaw and renders it inauthentic. However, others have argued that English became a naturalized subcontinental language long ago. And it is part of the achievement of English-language Indian writers to have found literary voices as distinctively Indian, but also suitable for all purposes of art, as those other languages forged in Ireland, Africa, the West Indies, and the United States.

Encyclopaedia of Indian English Criticism is prepared keeping in view of the Indian students undergoing P.G. and U.G. in different Indian Universities. All authors and their works are selected strictly following the latest syllabus. Critical discussions are examination oriented. This encyclopaedia is a huge source of reference for scholars and teachers. The major works of selected authors are critically analysed taking help of different expert critics and research scholars working on those particular authors.

Editors

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1

Introduction

"I write to you, at the hour of dusk, the auspicious hour, because it is non-dual and therefore transcendent: the moment when the day and night do not meet, but leave a depth of silence, and so the edge of sound, lingering towards its origins. It's a noble hour because it affirms the unnameable."
—*Raja Rao, 1988*

Rao, who was educated in India and England, is one of India's most outstanding authors writing in English. His distinctive style captures the rhythms of Indian speech and idiomatic expression. His writing is complex but poetic. Intensely philosophical, Rao examines, in his fiction, the religious and mythic roots of India, at times offering a comparison to Western thought.

Rao grew up during colonial India's struggle for independence and his first novel, *Kanthapura*, depicts the impact of Gandhi's passive resistance movement on a South Indian village. *The Serpent and the Rope*, considered his best work, describes the dissolution of a marriage between an Indian student and his French wife. It is semi-autobiographical, and because of its extensive symbolism and the nature of its philosophical discussion, it is considered a metaphysical novel. *The Cat and Shakespeare*, also metaphysical, is an allegory which has been variously interpreted. *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* is a 1947 collection of some early short stories.

His novels are considered to be among the finest Indian written in English. The first, *Kanthapura* (1938), describes the daily life of Indian villages during a revolt against an overbearing plantation owner. Rao's commitment to Gandhian non-violence is clearly revealed in his description of the peasants' conversion to the principle of civil disobedience. *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) is a semiautobiographical account of a marriage between intellectuals that is destroyed by philosophical discord.

His metaphysical novel *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) is a tale of individual destiny. And in *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) he examines the political complexities of Indian liberalism. All four works are profoundly serious, reflecting Rao's abiding concern with the potential clashes between pragmatism and ideals. He has also published two collections of short stories, *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* (1947) and *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978). With his profound and innovative fiction, Raja Rao has enabled modern readers of English to experience the spiritual depths of Indian culture. All of his works involve a search for the fundamental reality in life, which has led him to an investigation of the very nature of writing.

For Raja Rao, writing is a *sadhana,* a spiritual discipline whose goal is the realization of Truth itself. Words become *mantras,* powerful syllables whose sound and meaning can move the reader toward that goal by giving them experiences of it. Within India and influential circles in the West, Raja Rao's reputation has been great. The audience for his work comprises general readers, readers around the world who are interested in India, and Indian readers. His writing is the voice of an ancient, insightful culture that speaks to the modern world.

"I am a proud Indian. It is my karma that has destined me to live more than half my life outside this Punyabhumi. India indeed is the land of the ultimate value. The Truth. Hence we can believe and shout Satyameva Jayate."

—Raja Rao, 1998

According to R. Parthasarathy, poet, translator, critic, editor, and Director of the Program in Asian Studies at Skidmore College in New York, "Rao is one of the most innovative novelists now writing. Departing boldly from the European tradition of the novel, he has indigenized it in the process of assimilating material from the Indian literary tradition. He has put the novel to uses to which it had not perhaps been put before by exploring the metaphysical basis of writing itself; of, in fact, the word. ... As a writer, Rao's concern is with the human condition rather than with a particular nation or ethnic group. ... The house of fiction that Rao has built is founded on the metaphysical and linguistic speculations of the Indians. It is to the masters of fiction in our time, such as Proust and Joyce, that we must ultimately turn for a writer of comparable stature."

The Raja Rao Publication Project is working to make all of Raja Rao's writings, especially those still unpublished, available to readers around the world who are interested in his fiction and thought. The task of the project is to organize, edit, and secure publication for Raja Rao's unpublished novels, short stories, poetry, essays, and correspondence.

Rao's involvement in the nationalist movement is reflected in his first two books. The novel *Kanthapura* (1938) was an account of the impact of Gandhi's teaching on non-violent resistance against the British. The story is seen from the perspective of a small Mysore village in South India. Rao borrows the style and structure from Indian vernacular tales and folk-epic. The narrator is an old woman. She tells how the community obtains from daily life, with its millennia-old worship of the local deity, the strength to stand against the British Raj. In the character of the young Moorthy, who comes back from the city, Rao portrays an idealist and supporter of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*, who wants to cross the traditional barriers of caste. The younger generation has city ways, they read city books, and they even call themselves Gandhi-men. Doré, as the old woman calls the "university graduate," has given up his "boots and hat and suit and had taken to dhoti and khadi, and it was said he had even given up his city habit of smoking." The work was highly praised by the English writer E.M. Forster, whose masterwork *A Passage to India* (1924) criticized British imperialism. However, Rao's India is not a certain geographical or historical entity, but more of a philosophical concept and a symbol of spiritual calling.

Rao returned to the theme of Gandhism in the short story collection *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947). In 1998 he published Gandhi's biography *Great Indian Way: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi*. After the war, Rao spent much of his time in France and travelling throughout the world. He visited America in 1950 and later spent some more time living in an ashram. In 1965 he married an actress, Katherine Jones. From 1965 to 1983 Rao lectured on Indian philosophy at the University of Texas, Austin. In 1988 he received the prestigious Neustadt International Prize for Literature. Several Neustadt Laureates have also received the Nobel Prize for literature, among them Gabriel García Márquez, Czeslaw Milosz, and Octavio Paz.

The Serpent and the Rope was written after a long silence during which Rao lived India, where he renewed a connection with his roots in the modern rendering of the Mahabharata legend of Satayavan and Savithri. The work also dramatized the relationships between Indian and Western culture. Ramaswamy, a young Brahmin studying in France, is married to a French college teacher, Madeleine, who sees her husband above all as a guru. As Ramaswamy struggles with commitments imposed on him by his Hindu family, his wife becomes a Buddhist in her spiritual quest and renounces worldly desires. She leaves her husband to find his own true self. The serpent in the title refers to the illusion and the rope to the reality. *Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) was a metaphysical comedy that answered philosophical questions posed in the earlier novels. In the book the Hindu notion of karma is symbolized by a cat. The hero discovers in his attempts to receive divine grace, that there is no dichotomy between himself and God. *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) was written early in Rao's career and was first published in French. It satirized communism as an ideological misunderstanding of man's ultimate aims, and argued that all foreign creeds gradually become Indianized. *The Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988) is peopled by characters from various cultures seeking their identities. Like Nabokov, Rao used the metaphor of the chess game to animate philosophical and psychological ideas. In the story Sivaram Sastri, an Indian mathematician in Paris, meets Proust, and recounts his love affairs and friendships. Rao has confessed: "I am no scholar. I am a creative writer. I love to play with ideas. It is like a chess game with horses, elephants, chamberlains and kings which might fight with one another. The game is not for winning. It is for rasa-delight." Raja Rao died of heart failure on July 8, 2006, at his home in Austin, Texas. He was 97.

Raja Rao was an Indian writer of English language novels and short stories, whose works are deeply rooted in Hinduism. Raja Rao's semi-autobiographical novel, *The Şerpent and the Rope* (1960), is a story of a search for spiritual truth in Europe and India. It established him as one of the finest Indian stylists.

Early Life and Career

Raja Rao was born on November 8, 1908 in Hassan, in the state of Mysore, now Karnataka in South India, into a well-known Brahmin (Hoysala Karnataka) family. He was the eldest of nine siblings, two brothers and seven sisters. His native language was Kannada, but his post-graduate education was in France, and all his publications in book form have been in English. His father taught Kannada at Nizam's College in what was then Hyderabad State. The death of his mother, when he was four, left a lasting impression on the novelist, the absence of a mother and orphanhood are recurring themes in his work. Another influence from early life was his grandfather, with whom he stayed in Hassan and Harihalli.

Rao was educated at Muslim schools, the Madarsa-e-Aliya in Hyderabad and the Aligarh Muslim University, where he became friends with Ahmed Ali. He began learning French at the University. After matriculation in 1927, Rao returned to Hyderabad and studied for his degree at Nizam's College. After graduation from Madras University, having majored in English and History, he won the Asiatic Scholarship of the Government of Hyderabad in 1929, for study abroad.

Rao moved to the University of Montpellier in France. He studied French language and literature, and later at the Sorbonne in Paris, he explored the Indian influence on Irish literature. He married Camille Mouly, who taught French at Montpellier, in 1931. The marriage lasted until 1939. Later he depicted the breakdown of their marriage in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Rao published his first stories in French and English. During 1931-32 he contributed four articles written in Kannada for *Jaya Karnataka,* an influential journal.

Nationalist Novelist

Returning to India in 1939, he edited with Iqbal Singh, *Changing India,* an anthology of modern Indian thought from Ram Mohan Roy to Jawaharlal Nehru. He participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942. In 1943-1944 he co-edited with Ahmed Ali a journal from Bombay called *Tomorrow*. He was the prime mover in the formation of a cultural organization, *Sri Vidya Samiti,* devoted to reviving the values of ancient Indian civilization; this organization failed shortly after inception. In Bombay, he was also associated with *Chetana,* a cultural society for the propagation of Indian thought and values.

Rao's involvement in the nationalist movement is reflected in his first two books. The novel *Kanthapura* (1938) was an account of the impact of Gandhi's teaching on non-violent resistance against the British. The story is seen from the perspective of a small Mysore village in South India. Rao borrows the style and structure from Indian vernacular tales and folk-epic. Rao returned to the theme of Gandhism in the short story collection *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947). In 1998 he published Gandhi's biography *Great Indian Way: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi.* In 1988 he received the prestigious International Neustadt Prize for Literature. *The Serpent and the Rope* was written after a long silence during which Rao returned to India. The work dramatized the relationships between Indian and Western culture. The serpent in the title refers to illusion and the rope to reality. *Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) was a metaphysical comedy that answered philosophical questions posed in the earlier novels.

Later Years

Rao relocated to the United States and was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin from 1966 to 1983, when he retired as Emeritus Professor. Courses he taught included *Marxism to Gandhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Indian philosophy: The Upanishads, Indian philosophy: The Metaphysical Basis of the Male and Female Principle.*

In 1965, he married Katherine Jones, an American stage actress. They have one son, Christopher Rama. In 1986, after his divorce from Katherine, Rao married his third wife, Susan, whom he met when she was a student at the University of Texas in the 1970s. Rao died on July 8, 2006 at Austin, Texas, at the age of 97.

The Philosophy of Raja Rao

I am a man of silence. And words emerge from that silence with light, of light, and light is sacred. One wonders that there is the word at all, *Sabda* and one asks oneself, where did it come from? How does it arise? I have asked this question for many, many years. I've asked it of linguists, I've asked it of poets, I've asked it of scholars. The word seems to come first as an impulsion from the nowhere, and then as a prehension, and it becomes less and less esoteric—till it begins to be concrete. And the concrete becoming ever more earthy, and the earthy communicated, as the common word, alas, seems to possess least of that original light.

The writer or poet is he who seeks back the common word to its origin of silence, in order that the manifested word become light. There was a great poet of the West, the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke. He said objects come to you to be named. One of the ideas that has involved me deeply these many years is: where does the word dissolve and become meaning? Meaning itself, of course, is beyond the sound of the word, which comes to me only as an image in the brain, but *that* which sees the image in the brain (says our great sage of the sixth century, Sri Shankara) nobody has ever seen. Thus the word coming of light is seen eventually by light. That is, every word-image is seen by light, and that is its meaning. Therefore the effort of the writer, if he is sincere, is to forget himself in the process and go back to the light from which words come. Go back where? That is, those who read or those who hear must reach back to their own light. And that light I think is prayer.

My ancestors and, yes, the ancestors of some of you or of most of you who speak the English tongue, came from the same part of the world thousands of years ago. Was it from the Caucasus or the North Pole? One is not certain yet. They spoke a language close to my own language and close to your language. There is in America a remarkable dictionary called the *American Heritage Dictionary*. It offers almost a hundred pages (at the very end) of the Indo-European roots of many of our words. Most of you are of European origin. At least your thinking has been conditioned by European thought. There is thus a common way of thinking, an Indo-European way of thinking, between us, so that we are not so far from each other as we often think we are. And beyond the Indo-European way of thinking in Asia, Africa, Polynesia, is *that* same human light by which all words become meaning. Finally, there is only one meaning, not for every word, but for all words *where* the word, any word, from any language, dissolves into knowledge. It is only there at the dissolution of the sound of the word or of the image of the word that you say you understand. And *here* there is neither you nor I. That is what I have been trying to achieve. That I become no one, that no one shine but It.

I want to say to you in utter honesty: I would like to be completely nameless, and just be that reality which is beyond all of us who hear me—that reality which evokes in me you, and I in each one listening to me this evening, that there be no one there but light. And it is of that reality that the sages have spoken. The sage is one, someone beyond the saint. He is no one. He is the real seer.

In fact, we are all sages, but we don't recognize it. That is what the Indian tradition says. In the act of seeing, that is, of the seer, the seen, and the seeing, in seeing alone is there pure light. Where this comes from, nobody can name. I once asked Dr. Oppenheimer, the scientist, who told me his hands were soiled by the atom bomb: Have you ever seen an object? And he answered: Never. If a scientist like Dr. Oppenheimer says he has never seen an object, yet I am hearing him say what he has in all honesty declared, it is that level of knowledge I would like to reach from where I truly write. It is to that root of writing I pay homage. The Neustadt Prize is thus not given to me, but the That which is far beyond me, yet in me—because I alone know I am incapable of writing what people say I have written.

The earth's circumference may be but 24,830 miles, its age might be some four or five billion years, an incident, as geologists and astronomers believe, we may be just a spot in this ever expanding, ever exploding universe, time and circumstance may be irreversible, man and woman like light and night, yet there is a feeling, something is missing in this explanation, and that when you sit in front of a well-adorned and elegantly clad woman, young, innocent and round, were she your sister (it may well have been your your mother, your aunt, or maybe your niece), there's an area of awareness, a silken inner move that unveils a different dimension of knowledge, as if one's hands had eyes, one's ears could speak, one's legs smell, one's mind read itself, at once a seeming distance with oneself, a feel of nearness with one's being, somewhat uncomfortable but so exalting a situation, one wonders why this paradox should exist, except that, when rightly known, one, that is, when there is *no one,* this no one, who is One, knows there is neither seer nor seen, thinker nor thought, and it's this game that we would play with ourselves, and for then it would be real and could suddenly be heard as some distant music, a music like Krishna's flute which brought all the cows and gopis to the bank of the Yamuna, the cattle tearing away their tethers, the women running from their husbands, from their homes, for when that music comes to your inner ear, and you cognize there is none there but Krishna, he the music and the dance, the river and the woman, that it's all one melody, and is not even Krishna, when you see it properly, it's like isness turning on its self-pivot, singing. Yes, isness sings, the song, the woman, and the affirmation, and the man who is no man: Man. It's this transcendence from duality that makes life possible, and meaning self-evident.

Thus our revolving earth, with its tigers and elephants in the forest, the rhino and the porcupine, the snake and the chital deer, the birth of the Ganga in the Himalaya, the arising of the Seine in the Massif Central, and the Rhone in the Jura mountains (with the Rhine), the sun in the sky, and the vast milky way, the Einsteinian curve of space, the delighting of time with itself—all, all is just one melody, a melody that nobody hears, for melody cannot hear itself, so created the hearer as its game-partner again for play. Thus play is life, and so the dance. You dance to annihilate space and time, and thiswise dissolved, you are pure happiness. Can you not see it there from Trocadero, down to the river, and then up, tier after tier to Montmartre, the mountain of the martyrs, from the deep curve of inner space, and in the time that has died at each beat of pulse.

2

The Literary Art of Raja Rao

Sometimes too much emphasis is given on the relation between, say, distinctive features of Raja Rao's style and traits of his Hindu-Brahminical metaphysics of psyche. Similarly the author's attitude towards world and the method of organizing experience are linked with his style. Gandhian prose style is a typical illustration of this kind. Linguistic or literary studies of style are run of the mill methods. Sociological and Marxist interpretations of the period style are many. However semantic-aesthetic and emotional functions of style in the text are less studied comparatively. Thus interdisciplinary pluralistic approaches have expanded the vistas of stylistic studies in which we have to increase the literacy of using stylometers.

"There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich *sthala-purana*, or legendary history, of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village—Rama might have rested under this pipal tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate. In this way the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright....

We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move, we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on. And our paths are paths interminable. The *Mahabharata* has 214,778 verses and the *Ramayana* 48,000. The *Puranas* are endless and innumerable. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous 'ats' and 'ons' to bother us—we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story.

It may have been told of an evening, when as the dusk falls, and through the sudden quiet, lights leap up in house after house, and stretching her bedding on the veranda, a grandmother might have told you, newcomer, the sad tale of her village.

"The whole oeuvre of Raja Rao is notable for seriousness of purpose, profundity of thought, a flair for vivid presentation of detail and a distinctive and vigorous English prose. ... In fact, Raja Rao's own style is as yet the best example of this kind of distinctive expression in Indian fiction in English. Rao is one of the most innovative novelists now writing. Departing boldly from the European tradition of the novel he has indigenized it in the process of assimilating material from the Indian literary tradition. He explores the metaphysical basis of writing itself, and of the world, through his works of fiction. His concern is with the human condition rather than with a particular nation or people. Writing to him is sadhana, a form of spiritual growth. That is why he can say that he would go on writing even if he were alone in the world. In appropriating for fiction the domain of metaphysics, Raja Rao has enlarged the potential of the very genre." —excerpted from U.R. Anantha Murthy's essay, "Raja Rao" in *Word as Mantra*, Robert L. Hardgrave, ed., Delhi, Katha, 1998.

"Raja Rao has received due acclaim for his innovative genetic contributions to Indian English writing, for being indeed a founding author of this branch of modern literature, and for pioneering a distinctive Indian subgenre of fiction usually referred to as the metaphysical novel. This type of novel, anticipated and conceived in some of Rao's short stories, was of course presented to us in 1960 as *The Serpent and the Rope*. The experimental impulses in Rao's oeuvre are so rich, diverse, yet (let us be frank) at times obscure and esoteric as to defy ready definition and convenient classification. Still, even initial responses to Rao's work recognize his literary experimentation with language, idiom, symbolism, cross-cultural narratology, autobiography, philosophy, history, romance, *Pilgrim's Progress* archetypes, and representation of character and human relationships, to name some of the main and more obvious areas of his creativity." *—excerpted from S.C. Harrex's essay, "Typology and Modes: Raja Rao's Experiments in Short Story," in World Literature Today, Autumn 1988*

Young Moorthy, back from the city with "new ideas," cuts across the ancient barriers of caste to unite the villagers in non-violent action, which is met with violence by landlords and police. The dramatic tale unfolds in a poetic, almost mythical style which conveys as never before the rich textures of Indian rural life. The narrator is an old woman, imbued with the legendary history of the region, who knows the past of all the characters and comments on their actions with sharp-eyed wisdom. Her narrative, and the way she tells it, evokes the spirit of India's traditional folk-epics.

"E.M. Forster considered *Kanthapura* to be the best novel ever written in English by an Indian. Not the least of its merits is the picture it gives of life in one of the innumerable villages that are the repositories of India's ancient but living culture. In vivid detail, Rao describes the daily activities, the religious observances and the social structure of the community, and he brings to life in his pages a dozen or more unforgettable individual villagers. The novel is political on a suprerficial level, in that it chronicles a revolt against an exploitative plantation manager and the police who support him. But more profoundly, it traces the origins of the activities of the Congress party. One of the young men of the village, while away, undergoes a mystical conversion to Satyagraha, and returns to incite his fellow villagers to civil disobedience. He arouses in them not only a sense of social wrong but, more importantly, a religious fervour which proves to be the true source of their strength against the oppressors." — *excerpted from U.R. Anantha Murthy's essay, "Raja Rao" in Word as Mantra, Robert L. Hardgrave, ed., Delhi, Katha, 1998.*

The Serpent and the Rope (symbols of illusion and reality in Indian tradition) gives the full implication of the meeting of East and West on the most intimate plane by Rama, a young Indian, and his story moves through India, France, and England at the time of the Queen's Coronation. Madeleine, his French wife, seeks a human answer to her problems, which she ultimately finds in a personal equation of Catholicism and Buddhism; for Rama a solution is not so easy, but eventually he realizes that he must take the final leap into reality, and search for a Teacher, his Guru.

"Semi-autobiographical, *The Serpent and the Rope* records the disintegration of a marriage, mainly on philosophical grounds, of a very scholarly Indian Brahmin and a French woman professor. The union flounders on the incompatibility of the Brahmin's Vedantic conviction that 'Reality is my Self' and the wife's Western belief, even though she has become a Buddhist, that the evidence of our senses is based on an objective reality outside ourselves. 'The world is either unreal or real, the serpent or the rope,' the Brahmin assures his wife. 'There is no in-between-the-two...' The intellectual demands that Raja Rao, roaming at large through world history and among the religions, philosophies, and literatures of Europe and Asia, makes upon his readers are unequalled in any modern novel since Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain.* — *excerpted from U.R. Anantha Murthy's essay, "Raja Rao" in Word as Mantra, Robert L. Hardgrave, ed., Delhi, Katha, 1998.*

Wittily, with extraordinary common sense and gusto, Govindan Nair—an astute, down-to-earth philosopher and clerk—tackles the problems of routine living. His refreshing and unorthodox conclusions continally panic Ramakrishna Pai, Nair's friend, neighbor, and narrator of the story. This is a gentle, almost teasing fable, plain-spoken and humorous. Descriptions of daily concerns are compassionate and evocative. The raw texture of Indian life is woven into the tale of two friends whose own lives have the simplicity of joy and the unaffected universality of Shakespeare, who India has wisely made her own.

"*The Cat and Shakespeare* is much shorter and lighter in tone than *The Serpent and the Rope,* though scarcely less metaphysical. The subject of its probings is the problem of individual destiny, and the solution is conveyed through an odd analogy offered by a government clerk: 'Learn the way of the kitten. Then you are saved. Allow the mother cat, sir, to carry you.' Raja Rao here exploits the Vedantic idea of the world being a play, lila, of the Absolute, and the result is a hilarious comedy that does not even spare Shakespeare and his language." —excerpted from U.R. Anantha Murthy's essay, "Raja Rao" in *Word as Mantra,* Robert L. Hardgrave, ed., Delhi, Katha, 1998.

The Chessmaster and His Moves functions, all at once, at several different levels. At one level it is the story of an impossible love between Sivarama Sastri, an Indian mathematician working in Paris and a married woman which can only end in sorrow and despair. To come to terms with its impossibility, the protagonists turn inward in their search for answer and meaning, transforming the book into a metaphysical exploration. Amidst this search, each and every act, big or seemingly small, gets imbued with special meaning. Sastri's love for the French actress, Suzanne Chantereux, or her beguiling, effervescent compatriot Mireille, for instance, serve to underline the differences between the East and West; while the latter seek happiness in the world, Sastri is looking for freedom from the world itself.

The Chessmaster is rich: in language, plot, in complexity, too, it is rich. And rich in locale and in its large cast of memorable characters Indian, European, African, and Jewish. By turns tender, tragic, sensuous or filled with laughter and delight the book nevertheless remains utterly serious, concerned with the author's abstract search for the Absolute. Grand in sweep and range, the story moves from France to London, and on to the Himalayas and Bengal and contains, perhaps for the first time ever in a literary work, a dialogue between a Brahmin and a Rabbi: an exploration of reasons for the Holocaust and an attempt to expiate it.

"*The Chessmaster and His Moves* is firmly rooted in the Indian metaphysical tradition that it seeks to illuminate in the form of an epic novel encompassing three countries, India, England and France besides the fourth one, of the human mind. Structured as a bhashya on the esoteric knowledge of India often expressed in the terse, aphoristic style charactersitic of such commentaries, totally indigenous in the narrative pattern that collapses a number of stories as in Bana's *Kadambari* or the *Vikramaditya Tales, The Chessmaster and His Moves* reveals the great Upanishadic truth of tat twam asi from the metaphysical position of Advaita Vedanta. The characters here seem to comprise a scale of spiritual awareness in terms of deliverance." *excerpted from U.R. Anantha Murthy's essay, "Raja Rao" in Word as Mantra, Robert L. Hardgrave, ed., Delhi, Katha, 1998*. In this book Raja Rao explores the play of life as it unfolds in Benares, the cherished ultimate destination of millions of Indians, the holy city to die in. And so it is that to the Ganga ghats in Benares come rajahs and princes from Bengal; beggars; Katiawari merchants; courtesans; crooks; simpletons and charlatans—seeking meaning in life, or redemption in death. No less varied are the creatures of Benares themselves: the gentle, brahmchari Madhoba and his Mohini, a feminine presence, 'something more than a goddess, a woman;' Bhim, the sage parrot; the Brahmini cow Jhaveri Bai peering at her reflection in the Ganga waters; bounteous concubines like Nanna; hard-swearing, mantra-chanting sadhus laughing at the foibles of others.

"These stories are so structured that the whole book should be read as one single novel. All persons and places are not true, but real." —*from Raja Rao's introduction, 1988*

> "India is not a country," writes Raja Rao, "it is a perspective." This book explores the perspective which he calls India, its metaphysic, the philosophical underpinning that sets India apart, uniquely distinguishes its civilization.

Through fable and real-life encounters, descriptions of journeys and events, or in discussions with contemporaries, Raja Rao's quest is unceasing and single-focused: how this perspective alone can give meaning to man's daily action. He draws on a wide range of sources, including the Vedas, Upanishads, teachings of Sankara, the writings of Bhartrihari, and the poetry of Valery and Mallarme. There are essays that describe his meetings with Gandhi and Nehru, so too with Forster and Malraux, westerners who drew close to India.

This book grew over several decades during which Raja Rao created his unique body of fiction. *The Meaning of India* paints and details the essential metaphysical backdrop of his acclaimed writing. Written in rhythmic, sparkling style which Raja Rao has made his own since *Kanthapura,* both simple and eclectic, expansive and precise, this book holds that India's civilization and meaning can only be known by understanding the truth about one's own existence and that of the world.

This meaning, as Raja Rao puts it, "is not a question of success or defeat, but abolition of contradiction, of duality."

3

Raja Rao's *The Serpent and The Rope*

Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* was hailed as a truly Indian novel when it was published in 1960. Few Indian-English novels have expressed the Indian sensibility with as much authenticity and power. *The Serpent and the Rope* which has a strong autobiographical colouring is the story of Ramaswamy, a young Brahmin, who goes to France to do research in history. He marries a Frenchwoman, but slowly realizes the gulf between Indian and Western concepts of love, marriage and family; in the end he leaves for India to go to his Guru, his marriage having broken down.

Rao has forged a style which owes more to Indian traditional story-telling than to the traditional novel, and freely quotes from Sanskrit (and French) to recreate the hero's cultural ambience. As Naik puts it: "Its philosophical profundity and symbolic richness, its lyrical beauty and descriptive power, and its daring experimentation with form and style make a major achievement." Rao's writing is so persuasive that critics have generally tended to take Ramaswamy as a truly learned Indian, and a Sanskrit scholar. An attempt is made here to examine Ramaswamy's knowledge of Sanskrit and Indian philosophy.

The novel is full of philosophical disquisitions, many of them dramatically appropriate, for Ramaswamy's closest friends abroad are the newly converted Russian Georges KhuschbertiefF, the Spaniard Lezo, who knows seventeen languages, and the Cambridge friends of Savithri.

Ramaswamy himself is much given to philosophical musings, his comments on Communism, Nietzsche, Marx, Nazism, Dostoevsky, American civilization, etc., occur throughout the book. But Raja Rao is not expounding any system of philosophy, as a brief look at one of the passages will show:

> To be orthodox, to be a *smartha,* I said to myself, is to accept the real. Stalin is orthodox; he is crude and smelly like some Jesuit father, he the product of a seminary. But Trotsky promised us beauty, promised us paradise. There is a saying that when Trotsky was talking of the beautiful world revolution, Stalin was making statistics of the bovine riches of Soviet Russia.... But the *smartha* — some innocent knows this world is intangible, and all worlds therefore are intangible, and turns his vision inwards... .

The long passage meanders on, through Napoleon, Beatrice, Eva Braun and that "Cathar" Hitler; but is merely a reflection of Ramaswamy's mind, an illustration of the way it works, seeing parallels in the most disparate characters and incidents of history. The passage above is not a definition of the meaning of *smartha* which is what one would expect if it were to be read as a philosophical treatise, in fact he completely skips over the root meaning of the word (a *smartha* is literally one who follows the *smrithis,* the traditional laws; followers of Sankaracharya call themselves *smarthas).*

One notices that such passages do not build up to any conclusion; they only vaguely formulate the dichotomy between Communism, Tantra, the Jewish acceptance of the reality of the world on the one hand, and Nietzsche, the Superman and the Cathar rejection of the world on the other.

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Ramaswamy does not follow Sankara to the exclusion of other systems of Indian philosophy, though he time and again proclaims his faith in Advaita-vedanta and Sankara. A consideration of the way he approaches the Feminine Principle makes this clear. For Ramaswamy, the Feminine is not only the *Maya* of Advaita; it is also the *Sakti* of Tan trie philosophy, the *Prakriti* of the Samkhya system of Indian philosophy and the unattainable Mother Church of the Cathars. When Ramaswamy says that the world is for annihilation, one feels that he is expressing the *may avada* (theory of *Maya)* that the serpent and rope analogy suggests; at other places, he stresses the independent importance of woman, and this resembles the Samkhyan viewpoint.

Most schools of Indian philosophy believe in two principles underlying the universe: the active, the dynamic, the Feminine, which is the material cause of the universe, and the passive, the transcendental, the Masculine Absolute. Samkhya philosophy is dualistic: *prakriti*, the Feminine, is an independent real principle; it is, however, without consciousness, and the universe appears because of the reflection of the conscious *Purusa* (the Masculine principle) ; all creation is the result of the interaction of the two principles.

Advaita (Sankara's non-dualism) differs from Samkhya in denying independent reality to the Feminine Principle *Maya*, the cause of the universe. According to Sankara, *Brahman*, the Absolute, has two aspects: the transcendent *Nirgunabrahman*, and the creative *Isvara*, in which he is associated with *Maya*. *Maya* is neither identical with *Brahman* nor separate; she is an unthinkable, alogical, unexplainable mystery. She is an eternal falsity owing whatever false appearance of reality she possesses to her association with *Brahman* on whom she is dependent. Ramaswamy's glorification of the Feminine (the Queen's Coronation occasions a veritable hymn to the Feminine, pp. 357-58) is more in line with the Tantric concept of the Feminine. *Maya* to the Tantric worshipper is the Divine Mother *Mahamaya*, *Shakti* ("power,

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energy"). Siva and Sakti are two aspects of *Brahman*, and both are equally real, the Absolute and the Creative.

The world is accepted as *Sakti*, not as an unconscious principle dependent on the Masculine. "In the *Sakta* method, it is not by denial of the world, but by and through the world, when known as the Mother, that liberation is attained. World enjoyment is made the means and instrument of liberation." It is obvious that Raja Rao has great sympathy for the *Sakta* philosophy, which like Ramanuja's school of *Visistadv aita*, believes in the absolute reality of the Feminine.

His next novel, *The Cat and Shakespeare*, has a hero who believes in worship of the Feminine; the cat of the title is taken from Ramanuja's philosophy, which advocates total surrender to the Mother who will come to our rescue even as the passive kitten is lifted up and carried by the cat. It is interesting that some of the most beautiful hymns to the Mother in Sanskrit have been ascribed to Sankaracharya — one can worship the Mother even when believing that the world is an illusion.

"India," observes Heinrich Zimmer, "is one of the great homes of the popular fable. . . . The vividness and simple aptness of the images drive home the points of the teaching; they arc like pegs to which can be attached no end of abstract reasoning." And it is through the fables that Ramaswamy's Vedanta is best expressed. The nature of *Maya* as cosmic illusion which ceases to exist only for the person in a state of illumination is brought out well by the story of Radha, Krishna's beloved, and her crossing the rain-swollen Jamuna river. Krishna tells her to repeat the formula: "Krishna, the *brahmachari* (celibate), wishes that way be made." The river makes way for her, and she returns after feeding the sage Durvasa on the other bank by saying: "Durvasa, who is ever in *upavasa* (on fast) says open and let me pass." And Radha began to sob, "What a lie the world is, what a lie." And Krishna comforts her, saying, "The world, my dear, is not a lie, it is an illusion."

Unfortunately, Ramaswamy does not leave his comments on Advaita at the level of the fable; he plunges into direct exposition. He claims to present Sankara's school of thought, and scoffs at new interpretations, as his remarks on Sri Aurobindo show: "Aurobindo wanted, if you please, to improve upon the Advaita of Sri Sankara — which was like trying to improve on the numerical status of zero . . . you can no more improve on Vedanta than improve on zero" (*The Serpent and the Rope,* p. 297). Ramaswamy does not pay sufficient attention to the texts, and presents an inaccurate account of Advaita, as the passage explaining the title shows:

> The world is either unreal or real — the serpent or the rope. There is no in-between-the-two and all that's in-between is poetry, is sainthood. You might go on saying all the time, "No, no, it's the rope," and stand in the serpent. And looking at the rope from the serpent is to see paradises, saints, avataras, gods, heroes, universes. For wheresoever you go, you see only with the serpent's eyes. Whether you call it duality or modified duality, you invent a belvedere to heaven, you look at the rope from the posture of the serpent, you feel you are the serpent — you are— the rope is. But in true fact, with whatever eyes you see there is no serpent, there never was a serpent.

The key concept of Sankara's advaita is *Maya,* the in-between the two which Ramaswamy disowns. Sankaracharya did not consider the world unreal, he postulated three kinds of being: the real *(sat),* the unreal *(asat),* and *maya* or *mithya* (illusion). Sankara considered the world the realm of *maya,* something which defies strict classification into real or unreal *(sad-asadvilaksanä).* His poem *Vivekacudamani* ("The Crest Jewel of Discrimination") sums up the ideas expressed in his various commentaries. He expresses the concept of *maya* quite clearly in verses 108 and 109 of that work:

> *Avidya* or *Maya* called also the undifferentiated, is the power of the lord. She is without beginning, is made up of the three *gunas* and is superior to the effects. She is to be inferred by one of clear intellect only from the effects She produces. It is She who brings forth the whole universe. She is neither existent *(sat)* nor non-existent *(asat)* nor partaking of both characters; neither same nor different nor both; neither composed of parts nor an indivisible whole nor both. She is most wonderful and cannot be described in words.

Ramaswamy's exposition overlooks this third key category, "neither real nor unreal" in Sankara's words. David McCutchion can hardly be blamed when he misunderstands Vedanta and says: "Raja Rao's serpent and rope are Shakespeare's bush and bear." The rope, for Sankara is not simply illusion; it is Cosmic Illusion which is universal and without a beginning, and which ends only for the person who reaches a state of illumination. For the rest of humanity, there is a serpent, and always was a serpent.

Swami Prabhavananda explains the concept thus : "*Maya,* says Sankara, is not only universal but beginningless and endless. A distinction must be made, however, between *maya* as a universal principle and ignorance *(avidya)* which is individual. Individual ignorance is beginningless, but it can end at any moment; it is lost when a man achieves spiritual illumination. Thus the world may vanish from the consciousness of an individual and yet continue to exist for the rest of mankind."

Some justification could be found for the over simplification evident in the exposition of the title, because it is addressed to Madeleine, a Frenchwoman. When the same phraseology is put into the mouth of Rama's scholarly grandfather, Ramanna, the reader conversant with Advaita feels uncomfortable. Rama talks of his grandfather with great respect: "Grandfather Ramanna taught me this or that, of

Amaru, Nirukta, the Isa and Kena upanisads" (p. 284). Rama thinks nostalgically of the simple village Brahmin's life, who would read "the Mandukya Upanisad with Gaudapada's Karika, and then Sankara's commentary on it. "Gaudapada's *Karika* has been hailed as a basic text of Advaita by Sankara; he says that it "embodies in itself the quintessence of the substance of the authentic philosophy of Vedanta."

This is what the *Karika* has to say about *Maya:* The unreal cannot be bom either really or through Maya. For the son of a barren woman is born neither in reality nor in illusion. (Gaudapada's *Karika*, III, 28)

Throughout the novel, Ramaswamy confuses the state of *maya* with the unreal — analogies like the horns on the head of a hare or the barren woman's son, applied by Sankara to the unreal *(asat)* are used by Ramaswamy for *Maya*. This is how his scholarly grandfather explains the doctrine of *Maya:*

> ... and Grandfather Ramanna reading the Upanishads to old fogeys, who come and listen, afternoon after afternoon, saying, "Oh yes, Maya, it's like the son of a barren woman or the horns on the head of a hare," and the shaven widows and the tufted heads saying, "So it is indeed, Rammanore." *(The Serpent and the Rope*, p. 150)

Ramaswamy hardly ever talks about the three states of being postulated by Sankara; when he does mention the central doctrine of Sankara, he uses the wrong analogy for it:

> According to the Hindu concept there is not only *satya* and *asatya*, Truth and Untruth, but also *mitya* (sic), illusion — like the horns on the head of a rabbit or the son of a barren woman. Paradise, I argued, was the inversion of Truth . . . . So does the deer drink water of the mirage or the barren woman have her son. *(The Serpent and the Rope*, p. 382)

The analogy of the mirage, which depends on the real desert, is used, like the serpent based on the rope, for *mithya* — this is quite different from the square circle or the barren woman's son, analogies for *asatya*, "ideas which are altogether unreal and imaginary, which represent a total impossibility or a flat contradiction in terms."

Raja Rao has very successfully used Sanskrit to build up the Indian atmosphere of the novel. Many of the Sanskrit quotations in *The Serpent and the Rope* are from Sankaracharya's advaitic hymns, thus reinforcing the suggestion of "the serpent and the rope" of the title. Ramaswamy loves the language, and it is clear from the novel that the stotras of the *Brihadstotraratnakara* are a part of his consciousness. Raja Rao himself mentions this book of Sanskrit hymns as next only to the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in the influence it has had on him. Rao admits that Sanskrit is a language which he "knows poorly but understands deeply." Professor M . K. Naik has noted the "numerous errors in Sanskrit quotations," but he stops with citing a mistake of transliteration. Raja Rao must have laboured under a great disadvantage in publishing such passages of Sanskrit transliterated into English, and perhaps mistakes in printing could not be avoided. But no attempt has been made to correct these mistakes in the second (Indian) edition. At places, the translation does not correspond with the transliterated passage. For instance, towards the end of the novel, Ramaswamy turns to Sanskrit to express his sense of alienation from the world:

> Kashwam koham kutha äyatha ka më janani ko më tatah?
>
> Who are you and whose; whence have you come? *(The Serpent and the Rope,* p. 407)

Verse 23 of Sankara's famous chant *Bhaja-Govindam* starts *kastvam koham kuta äyätah kä me janani ko me tätah* (Who are you? Who am I? Whence have I come? Who is my mother and who is my father?). The passage artistically suggests

Ramaswamy's *vairagya* (disenchantment with the world), but the Sanskrit-knowing reader is distracted by the poor translation. At another point, the translation is wholly unrelated to the Sanskrit.

In the first chapter, Ramaswamy talks of chanting the *Gangastakam* to Little Mother, "very sensitive to Sanskrit hymns," but what has been published is a transliteration of Rama's oft-repeated (and consistently misprinted) words of Sankara's *Kasipancakam: 'Kashi kshetram, shariram tribhuvana jananim ...'*

And nigh the river-bank, Thy water is strewn, With kusha grass and flowers, There thrown by Sages at morn and even. May the waters of the Ganges protect us, *(The Serpent and the Rope,* p. 36) These mistakes may be ascribed to the difficulties inherent in publishing a complex book. But there is one inexplicable slip — Rao's rendering of the *Gayatri mantra:*

> "I had said it day after day, almost for twenty years; I must have said it a million million times : *lOM,* O face of Truth with a disk of Gold, remove the mist (of ignorance) that I may see you face to face.' But this time I said it quietly, tenderly, as one speaks to something near, breathful, intimate...." *(The Serpent and the Rope,* p. 248)

This is not a misprint as its repetition a few pages ahead shows:... Grandfather Ramanna . . . who had first whispered unto my ear the Gayathri, *lOM,* O face of Truth ... ' *(The Serpent and the Rope,* p. 251)

It is this version which Raja Rao uses in a footnote to the original edition of *Kanthapura,* and his notes to the American edition (1963) repeat the mistake: The Gayathri mantra runs as follows: "O face of the True Sun, now hidden by a disc of gold, may we know the Reality, and see thee face to face." This is not a translation of the *Gayathri,* however free. Various translations are given below:

> We meditate on the adorable glory of the radiant sun. May he direct our intellect. Swami Madhavananda May we meditate on the Adorable Light of that Divine Generator who quickens our understanding. 'Swami yimalananda' We meditate on that excellent light of the Sun. May he illuminate our minds. J. L. Shastri "Let us meditate on the Divine Brilliance. May its light inspire who quickens our understanding. Lape In fact, no word in the original corresponds with a single word of Rao's. We suspect that Raja Rao is translating not the *Gayathri,* but this hymn from the *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad:* The Face of Truth is hidden with a disc (vessel) of gold. O Pusan (Sun) remove it, so that I, whose reality is Truth, may see (the face)" *(Brhadaranyaka Upanisad,* Book V , section xv, i)

The Gayathri is not just a hymn; it is considered the greatest of mantras, and the first thing the *dui ja* (twice-born) boy is taught during his initiation ceremony. Thereafter, orthodox Brahmins recite it at least thrice a day, at sunrise, noon and sunset. The Gayathri can be considered *the* Hindu mantra ; it is said that the violent Hindu mobs during the Partition of India in 1947 used to test any man who claimed to be a Hindu by asking him to recite the Gayathri. One is inclined to suspect that Raja Rao would have failed and been thrown to the wolves. Granting that Rao's remarks on Advaita (which he always refers to as Vedanta, as if it were the *only* system of Vedanta) and his Sanskrit are incorrect, the question arises how far it affects the novel. If we look for an erudite Advaita scholar in the character of Ramaswamy, we shall be disappointed. The many allusions in the novel have another function to perform, for the novel is to be read not as philosophy but as poetry. The novel has been compared to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land,* and I. A. Richards' comments on the many allusions in Eliot's poems are equally true of Raja Rao's novel:

> These things come in, not that the reader may be ingenious or admire the writer's erudition but for the sake of the emotional aura which they bring and the attitudes they incite.

The ideas are of all kinds, abstract and concrete, general and particular, and, like the musician's phrase, they are arranged, not that they may tell something, but that their effects in us may combine into a coherent whole of feeling and attitude and produce a peculiar liberation of the will. They are there to be responded to, not to be pondered or worked out.

The opening passage itself of *The Serpent and the Rope* shows how Rao uses the many allusions not to exhibit the erudition of his central character but for the atmosphere they generate; an infinitude of time and distance is evoked by the references to Indian sages and contemporary Europe all together. Scholarly inaccuracy in writing about Advaita or quoting Sanskrit does not detract much from the merit of the work, for we have to judge it as fiction, not as a scholarly thesis. But the fact remains that a person ignorant of Sanskrit and Indian philosophy can respond to the novel better than someone with a deep knowledge of Sanskrit, who would find the frequent mistakes jarring.

THE USE OF MYTH IN RAJA RAO'S THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE

Of all Indian writers of fiction in English it is Raja Rao whose work is, both in content and form, perhaps the most 'Indian', though he has not hesitated to draw freely upon the west. He has brought to Indian fiction in English many elements in which it has previously been largely deficient: an epic breadth of vision, a metaphysical rigour and depth of thought, a symbolic richness, a lyrical fervour and an essential "Indianness" of style.

Raja Rao is virtually the first major Indian writer in English to realize that the *"Indianness"* of his writing should make for not only a typically Indian content but a characteristically Indian form as well. As he himself says: *"The Indian novel can only be epic in form and metaphysical in nature. It can only have story within story to show all stories are only parables"*. As a representative of the modern Indian ethos which shows a curious blend of ancient Indian tradition and modern Western attitudes, Raja Rao often makes a unique blend of techniques of modern western fiction and age-old methods of literary expression.

The influence of the Puranictradition in Raja Rao has been not only decisive and strong but amazingly sustained. Raja Rao's own words give support to this view: "The Serpent and the Rope" is to be taken like all my writing as an attempt at a Puranic recreation of Indian story-telling: that is to say, the story, as a story, is conveyed through a thin thread to which are attached (or which passes through) many other stories, fables and philosophical disquisitions, like a mala (garland)". Thus, M. K. Naik calls it a modern Indian Mahapurana in miniature and both the matter and manner, of the Puranic tradition is a great moral or spiritual conflict involving both gods and men and The Serpent and the Rope sets forth an emotional conflict arising out of the marriage of two minds which are too true to themselves to co-exist in harmony.

It can be said that if Kanthapura is a Purana meant for an unsophisticated gathering, The Serpent and the Rope is a Mahapurana meant for a gathering of more sophisticated and intellectually mature listeners. Here, for the first time, we come into contact with a sensitive intellectual whose narration of the *"sad chronicle of his life"* includes echoes from an extensive field of scholarship stretching from myths and fables to abstruse philosophical dissertations. The reader, familiar with Eliot and Joyce, will tend to conclude that this is the first Indo-Anglian literary work which may be termed truly modern in its complex artistry which resides in its suggestive-ness and implications.

According to Joseph Campbell, myth is a system of metaphysics: it is a *"revelation of transcendental mysteries"*, it is *"symbolic of the spiritual norm for Man the Microcosm"*· Most of the criticism on The Serpent and the Rope had been devoted to the metaphysical and philosophical aspects of the novel. It is true that the novel offers rich material for the pursuit of such a study. Campbell has further said that myth is the picture language of metaphysics. But this study limits itself to studying how myth is used as a technique in the novel, and discusses metaphysics only where the mythical form refers to it. Almost the first thing one notices is the repeated and numerous references to myths and legends, Indian as well as Western. The extensive use of myths and legends, is not meant for digression as might appear at a superficial glance, but forms an integral part of the author's technique. Raja Rao himself has said that the discursive passages on myth and metaphysics are interpretations and not deviations.

The Serpent and the Rope is largely autobiographical fiction, a dialectical novel which draws many elements from epic, philosophical discourse and folk-narrative, and blends them all into a plastic flowing structure. The narrator is more intelligent and his point of view more sophisticated than in Kanthapura. Hence, the mythology here is more esoteric and emblematical. Legends and myths and folk wisdom are so well blended as to reveal a basic unity and organic conception of the novel. The hero Ramaswamy's sensibility absorbs astonishingly the myths and legends of different civilizations and integrates the past and the present into the essential oneness of history. Thus, he sees no difference between the Ganges and the Seine; George VI and the Indian Bharata of the Ramayana, 'for both of them believed in the impersonality of monarchy': *"The king can do no wrong"* just like Bharata's establishing a duality in himself by apologizing for being a king because after an apology he is no more a king but his agent only. He also equates Gandhi with Bhishma of the Mahabharata while explaining martyrdom. Likewise, he universalises *'matrishakti'* by making the 'purush' manifest through *'prakriti'* and by showing Queen Elizabeth II as the feminine principle that makes the universe move. *"To Mitra she is Varuna, to Indra she is Agni, to Rama she is Sita, to Krishna she is Radha"*.

The novel centres around Rama who is born a Brahmin, and believes in being a Brahmin. As *"the Brahmin is never contemporary"* (p.125), one of the main tasks of the author is to take the novel out of contemporaneity, free it from the bond of immediate time. In trying to achieve this Raja Rao has to face a serious problem by the very choice of his literary genre that is the novel which is always deeply rooted in temporal and spatial reality.

It is by this constant and copious use of myths, legends and fables that he attempts to impart timelessness to the characters and their interrelations. The hero is described by his wife Madeleine as *"either a thousand years old or three"* (p.140) and is *"the wisdom of ages"* (p.233). Immediate present means very little to him, his roots being deeply embedded in timelessness, as he himself says, *"I belong to the period of Mahabharatha"* (p.351).

The novel is at once the history of an intellectual's quest for self--knowledge, which takes the form of memory and autobiography, and an affirmation in philosophic terms of universal truths to which the hero is guided by tradition and experience. What happens is a consequence of Rama's decision *'to stop life and look into it'*. Rama's vital relationships - those with India, Madeleine and Savithri - are controlled and determined by his Brahmin identity and his conscious quest for self-knowledge. India is one cause of the parting of ways between Rama and Madeleine for, each tried to adopt the other's world-view, too divergent to permit a fruitful sharing of life. But there is also the basic metaphysical difference in their conception of self and Reality. Here we have the famous analogy of the serpent and the rope:

> *"The world is either unreal or real - the serpent or the rope. There is no in - between - the - two - and all that's in-between is poetry, is sainthood .... you see only with the serpent's eyes .... But in true fact, with whatever eyes you see there is no serpent, there never was a serpent.........One - the Guru - brings you the lantern; the road is seen ......'It's only the rope.' He shows it to you"*.

It states the advaita position of Sankara which is the ultimate truth which denies the world while affirming the underlying reality of Brahma, and emphasises the role of the Guru in removing ignorance (ajnana) of the nature of reality. These passages are, obviously, central to the navel whose main philosophical concern is the nature of Reality but, occuring as they do at the most crucial phase of the relationship between Rama and Madeleine, they are integral also to the navel as history. Rama's denial of the world as real, poses a serious threat to Madeleine's new found identity as a Buddhist. She realises that she can neither be an Ananda or a Beatrice to Rama and her relationship with him comes to a logical end. In Rama's view, Madeleine commits what his creator has called the heresy of the *'modern'* woman in trying to reach the ultimate directly, but Savithri is woman par excellence. Rama and Savithri to-gether affirm the central advaitic position that ultimate reality is identical with the individual self and that the duality of I and Thou is false. Her value of him was to wake into the truth of life, to be remembered unto God:

> *Nothing mare had happened in fact, than if you look deep and long at silence you perceive an orb of centripetal sound which explains why Parvati is daughter of Himalaya and Sita barn to the furrow of the field .... she became the awareness behind my awareness, the leap of my understanding. I lost the world and she became it.* (p.169).

Through Savithri Rama is able to achieve the annihilation of the world and attain a full recognition of his true self, but the ego, which the Guru alone can remove, persists and a perfect union, the Rama's formulation, is not yet possible. In Raja Rao's reworking of the Satyavan Savithri myth of the Mahabharata Satyavan is the symbol of *'the self, the Truth'* and Savithri a symbol of Life through which the self knows itself to be deathless and eternal. Rama had often thought of Kanthaka, the charger who had taken Gautama on his pilgrimage from which there is no returning, but when the time comes it is not Kanthaka but the Guru who takes him where he wants to go, for recognition and not renunciation is the way to freedom.

In The Serpent and the Rope, the present becomes a past, almost a continuation, of an old myth. Thus Madeleine is seen associating herself with the legend of Vashita and Buddha. The mythical parallel here extends our understanding of the present situation of Madeleine's loss of her child. Sometimes Raja Rao associates a myth or legend with a particular character to such an extent that the character becomes a part of the myth, and the present is mythologized into timelessness. This is the case with Savithri who is a fact and merges into the myth and becomes a symbol that she has always been in the Indian tradition, the Feminine principle in life, which means she is *'the earth, air, ether, sound'* and worshipped as such. Three legends are associated with Savithri: that of 'budumekaye', the legend of Tristran and Isolde and the Radha-Krishna legend. The first tale tells of the *'budumekaye* that guided the exiled prince Satyakama of Dharmapuri to a new kingdom, and later reconciled him to his parents and restored to him his original kingdom. Savithri's influence redirected him onto the path of his original pilgrimage.

Then again, Savithri is the Isolde of Ireland and Madeleine, the Isolde of the White Hands "lacks the warmth of love which Rama experiences with Savithri in London and Cambridge. The myth of Radha and Krishna and the allegorical representation of their love (the seeker and the sought) is well known, Rama-Savithri relationship is grounded in this myth. The fantastic ritual of Savithri worshipping Rama (pp. 210-212), just another human being, has given offence to many and is misunderstood. Mrs. Mukherjee feels that this appears ritualistic without being sufficiently human and is unnatural to the character of Savithri who has been depicted as a non-conformist. The basic fact is that the peculiar rendering of the Rama-Savithri relationship discourages a full-blooded human approach, and also the episode is mythicized from the start. Thus when Savithri asks to bring some Ganges water for the 'arathi', Rama gives ordinary water. The mythicization is self-conscious too. Savithri admits that she is a Cambridge under-graduate, who smokes too, and says, "I *have known my Lord for a thousand years, from janam to janam have I known my Krishna ....* "Moreover, this mythicized worship of the husband by the wife has its parallel in an actual ritual still widely practised in India, the Disha–Gauri vrata. The Rama-Savithri type of mythic relationship has its parallels in such pairs like Chandidas and Rami, Jayadeva and Padmavathi, and Rupmati and Baz Bahadur.

There are incidental references to many legends which are related to Mira, Malavika, Shakuntala, the Swastika, Rakhi, Jagannath Bhatt's marriage with Shah Jahan's daughter and the composition of Ganga Lehri, Rama and Ravana in relation to dharma, Sita's exile, Guru Arjun Dev, Rama's story retold every Saturday for some benediction, the origin of Hyderabad, the Holy Grail, and Wang-chu and Cheng-yi. But none of them is recurrent in the novel nor is any of these integral to it. Rama uses these legends successfully to establish a point of view. The digressive stories of Iswara Bhatta, and Krishna, Radha and Durvasa also are not integral but since Raja Rao is trying to revive the puranic tradition, these apparently unnecessary elements lose their superfluousness. Obviously the puranic narrative has a good deal to do with the tortuously rambling story unfolded by Ramaswamy, but some doubt arises if it is only this influence that underlies the form and style of the novel. Certainly, the style is anecdotal, digressive, self-indulgent; but its rambling qualities generate cross-references as memory catches up with itself, so that the narrative progresses in a series of loops along the path of Rama's life-story. Rama's narrative attempts to create an historical, cyclic order which progresses from tradition to family history, and thence to the immediate, personal past. The last stage usually arrives as a rude 'bump' that sends the narrator spinning off into the realms of legend, tradition and myth once more.

The Benares and the Ganga, which are mentioned often in the novel, also have many traditional mythic associations with both life and death. The Ganga is the river of the dead. But its waters also hold rejuvenative myths: "*....she represents joy (in this life) and hope (for the life to come). She washes away the sins of him whose ashes or corpse are committed to her waters, and secures for him rebirth among the gods in a realm of celestial bliss.*"

The author's immense erudition, his restless curiosity, his unortho-dox orthodoxy, his flaming Brahminism, his noble conception of India, his mastery of the English language and idiom make, The Serpent and the Rope a remarkable, even unique book. God, truth, love, nature, beauty, sex, art, music, religion, philosophy, metaphysics, and East-West, encounter are discussed leisurely and with sensitivity. No single theme permeates the book. In the words of K. Natwar Singh, fantasy piles over fantasy, plot upon subplot; the work has little structure in the conventional sense. *"But if the purists dismiss it* as a *clever and hectic accumulation of anecdotes by* a *mysterious, muddled mind, they will have missed the point. The vision may be personal; the ramifications are universal."*

Finally, Mrs. Mukherjee feels that the structural unity of the novel is based more on a philosophical concept than on a mythical parallel: Raja Rao unearths metaphysical propositions everywhere. Personal relations do not always count unless they correspond to some archetypal pattern, abstract truth is read into the smallest action; hence the interweaving of myths, instead of steadily illuminating a particular situation merely adds to the flux of general observations about the cosmic truth. The myths and legends are part of the characterization of Ramaswamy, but not integral to the progress of events.

While this is largely true, these legends are interesting in themselves and show some of the aspects of the composite phenomenon called life. What Raja Rao portrays is not faith or freedom in the usual sense but an introspective way of life, a monistic vision anchored in a central mythic structure. To comprehend it fully, one needs to belong, to be part of that evocative tradition. Raja Rao has tried to join myth and metaphysics into a harmonious whole. Raja Rao's greatness lies in the steadiness and fineness of his emotional and technical growth, together with his refusal to dilute the Indian myth. Thus The Serpent and the Rope is a classic of Indian fiction.

But critics do not seem to be easy about the use of myth in The Serpent and the Rope which is not surprising considering the complexity of its form and its narrator. Mythicizing reality through myths has a purpose if they are fully integrated within the texture of the theme as in The Waste Land. While accusing The Serpent and the Rope of different 'kinds of simplification' that an expatriate writer is prone to, Rajeev Taranath says that this 'simplification' spreads into his (Raja Rao's) use of myth and fable and makes them successful usually at the periphery of experience and not at the centre.....Eliot's use of myth is part of the essential structure of his creation. In Raja Rao it is subsidiary." So many legends and myths instead of clarifying the theme, seem to overwhelm the reader with a brilliant display of classical and oriental learning rather than with a sympathetic understanding of their inner meaning.

For instance, it is pointed out that Rama's affair with Savithri does not coalesce with Satyavan Savithri legend and Tristran-Isolde romance. But, one should bear in mind here that Raja Rao seems to concentrate more on the emotional emphasis of the legend he uses than on factual parallels. Like the rustic old woman narrator of Kanthapura, in The Serpent and the Rope too, the language of symbol and myth comes naturally to the narrator, Rama brought up in ancient Brahminic tradition. Like Baudelaire's man, he walks through a forest of symbols. A "huge flat stone at the edge of the garden" in his house in France becomes Shiva's bull, Nandi, for him and 'a huge gently-curved rock' at the top of the hill, an elephant. Rama's life-story can be appropriately summed up, in William York Tindall's words describing Melville's Billy Budd, 'a mixture of myth, fact and allusion that have values beyond reference'. Moreover, the importance of metaphysical speculations and conclusions can never be ignored in this book. "India", observes Heinrich Zimmer, "is one of the great homes of the popular fable .....The vividness and simple aptness of the images drive home the points of the teaching; they are like pegs to which can be attached no end of abstract reasoning."

It is through fables that Rama's Vedanta is best expressed. The nature of Maya as cosmic illusion which ceases to exist only for the person in a state of illumination is brought out well by the story of Radha, Krishna's beloved, and her crossing the rain-swollen Jamuna river. The acutal incidents are so fused with the old myths and legends, and theories of history based on certain metaphysical standpoint that the novel progresses more through digressions, either into myths, or discussions on metaphyscial problems, than through actual happenings in the world of phenomenal reality. One may see that Raja Rao is not so much narrating a story as weaving a romantic myth imbued with a variety of intellectual insights and spiritual apprehensions. One may hear discussion on Marxism-Nazism-Vedanta, Masculine-Feminine Principle, his-tory and individual identity; one may have legends and fables of various kinds culled from different cultures, or one may note a variety of objects being processed through the mythical imagination; but the effort is always the same: to convey a special vision of life with the aid of evocative philosophical suggestions and poetic insights.

Thus, a pattern is there in the novel beneath its "philosophical garrulousness" as some critics may regard it. "The poetic, dream-like intimations, the view of life offered from a position above the conscious mind, the mythical scaffolding, and, finally, the surrender of a liberal-humanistic emphasis on human reason and personality, are the truly revealing qualities of its Indianness. An unsigned review Hickory Record (NC) April 4, (1963) says: "Reflecting the flavour and wholeness of the traditional Indian way of life, where fact and fable, philosophy and the matter-of-fact blend into one, this semi-autobiographical novel can be called timeless, just as India herself seems timeless and otherworldly by virtue of her unchanging rituals."

4

Mythic Consciousness in Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe

Kantahpura is a novel which represents the freedom – movement in India, in a village divided into two sections: the Brahmins and the pariahs hence it signifies the Advaita Philosophy of Indian culture. Rao himself states that it is impossible to separate reality from orthodox Advaita Vedanta.

The goddess of the village people is Kanchamma. The legend holds that she killed a demon who visited the place asking for the young sons as food and the young women as wives. The sages Tripura underwent penances to bring such a goddess down to the place. There was a battle between the demon and the goddess Kenchamma and the hills on which it took place become red with the blood of the victim. The villagers have grate faith in Kanchamma who never lets them down.

The theme of the Kanthapura is the continuity of Indian traditions naturally in the Indian air from the soil just as wild flower from the jungle.Moorthy, Rangagowda, Bhatta, Ratna,Subhha Chetty, Ranganna and many other men and women seem to be rising from soil of Kanthapura.

Kanthapura is a spectrum coloured with three hues the social, political and mythological. It is in a sense, a work of realism in fiction and yet it is not purely realistic or naturalistic. This is combined with the strains of myth, of gods and goddess, of blind superstitious belief and uncanny insights. It is an image of real life observed in a visionary state of mind. The village has its goddess, its legends, its ploughing season, its epidemic of small pox, its toddy boot etc., its village priest, its village bully and a village money lender. It is a beautiful small village of simple people who still belongs to the old world of superstition.

The revolution in the sphere of the caste takes place with great determination. "There is neither caste, nor clan, nor family and yet 'they live like us', only they say too one should not marry early, one should allow widows to take husbands and Brahmin might marry a pariah and a pariah a Brahmin." This is what Moorthy is preaching in the village and which further leads to pollution of caste.

Moorthy's defection, however has little effect on the immutable nature of Indian culture represented in Kanthapura. Inspite of the challenge from socialism, Rao reinstates the sanctity of his Gandhi purana by abandoning Moorthy towards the end pat of the novel, thereby maintain the dharmic inevitability of Gandhism.

Moorthy was a young man who felt dissatisfied after he suffered a defeat. His faith in Gandhi was snaken for a moment but the novel does project the Mahatma as the chief inspiration. At onetime Nehru was also dissatisfied with Gandhi way of struggle but if Nehru had not been a true Gandhian, India would not have been in the state we are today. At best you can say that Moorthy was a deviating gandhian.

Apparently, it is Rao's intention to show Gandhi without flows. Any deviation from gandhi's polices and ideologies is sidelined to the extent that even Moorthy , the protagonist is given up in the ende in order to keep a competing socialism at bay which has the potential of impairing a cultural nationalist discourse.

As a heroic character, Moorthy possess all the traits of a Mohatma martyr. Yet his departure is contrary to the expectations. The reader builds of his character and his particular role in history for Rao's nationalist ideology leads one to expect the underpinning of the novel withen a timeless religious ethos that Raja Rao writes into novel the hero's defection from its prevailing ideology is a remarkable testimony to his loyality to history in the usual sense of the term. Moorthy's departure thus creates an inconsistency with the cyclical nature of the narrative and even suggests an alternative history.

The Strategic Setting of the Novel

Rao's choice of this village setting is strategic in view of his Gandhian loyalties. Gandhi locates his politics in the villages of India where the majority of Indian's population resides. Rao maintains the sanctity of the village at an ideological level, but permits mobility and change to heighten the historical significance of the national struggle Gandhi conceptualized.

The time when the action of the novel is set is the 1920s and 1930s, the period when Mahatma Gandhi had become the pivotal figure in India's struggle for freedom. Rao treats the history of the freedom movement at the level of hostility between village folk and the British colonial authority at a time when colonialism had become intensely heavy handed in its response to the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Kanthapura is an enchanting story of how the independence movement becomes a tragic reality in a tiny and secluded village in South India. The novel has the flavour of an epic as it emerges through the eyes of a delightful old woman who comments with wisdom and humour.

Telling of the Novel: As far as the form and technique of the novel is concerned Rao makes a deliberate attempt to follow traditional Indian narrative technique and it is Indian sensibility that informs Kanthapura. In fact both the spirit and the narrative technique of Kanthapura are primarily those of the Indian Puranas, which may be described as a popular encyclopaedia of ancient and medieval Hinduism, religious, philosophical, historical and social. Rao at the outset describes his novel as a sthala-purana legend of a place. The Puranas are a blend of narration, description, philosophical reflection, and religious teaching. The style is usually simple, flowing, and digressive.

Rao makes a highly innovative use of the English language to make it conform to the Kannada rhythm. In keeping with his theme in Kanthapura he experiments with language following the oral rhythms and narrative techniques of traditional models of writing. The emotional upheaval that shook Kanthapura is expressed by breaking the formal English syntax to suit the sudden changes of mood and sharp contrasts in tone. While the intuitive borrowing from language takes place at one level in the novel, at another interconnected level, "real" India is constructed by enshrining the novel in Gandhian ideology. It is a highly original style. The author's "Foreword" to the novel almost spells out the postcolonial cultural agenda:

> The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up-like Sanskrit or Persian was before but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians.

Rao's novel is significant as a cultural tract which rewrites true history against the "inauthentic" historical accounts compiled by Europeans, and because it effects a cultural revival through the use of indigenous themes and motifs. Rao is also alive to the fact that religion has the potential to move people beyond dormancy to display active political energy to the extent of sacrificing their lives. Kanthapura evokes a sense of community and freedom, construed as a spiritual quality which overcomes all bounds and crosses all barriers.

In order to allow an easy interchange between the world of men and the world of gods, between contemporaneity and antiquity, Rao thus equips his story with a protagonist whose role it is to enthuse the villagers into joining the political cause of India's struggle for freedom without reservation.

The tension between these two often contradictory levels of writing the mythic/poetic and the political/prosaic, is the defining characteristic of the novel. As will be seen, this tension is both a strength and a weakness to the narrative; on the one hand enhancing its sheer readability as a story, and on the other hand blurring readers' understanding of the realities of the Indian Independence struggle.

Moorthy and other Characters - Raja Rao's Tools in Telling

> He focuses on two individual leaders and their beliefs; the actual and the mythicized figure of Gandhi, and his transmutation into Moorthy, the saintly hero of the novel. As the movement reaches Kanthapura, young Moorthy, son of a Brahmin woman, Narasamma, takes up the responsibility of spreading Gandhi's message. He brings about cultural awakening among the villages by organizing harikathas ("tales of gods"). By a subtle subversion the harikatha is turned into an allegory of India's struggle for freedom wherein the Gandhian

> saga is inscribed. Moorthy visits the city, and returns a "Gandhi man". He has become a spokesman for Gandhi, by submitting to his attitudes and beliefs. The villagers describe him as "our own Gandhi", yet interestingly he never has an actual meeting with Gandhi. He has only seen him in a "vision" addressing a public meeting with himself pushing his way through the crowd and joining the band of volunteers and receiving inspiration by a touch of Gandhi's hand. This enables Rao to turn the historical moment into a visionary experience, and opens a space for the possibility of assumed politics.

Moorthy preaches and practices ahimsa (non-violent resistance), the hallmark of Gandhi's appeal to the public, and evokes an overwhelming response among the villagers who unite in common cause, ready to break the British laws, picket toddy shops, and fight against social evils like untouchability.

Moorthy has several sympathetic souls with him: Rangamma, the kind lady and a patron for harikatha celebrations, Ratna, the young widowed daughter of Kamalamma, Rangamma's sister, Patel Range Gowda, the revenue collector, and others. But there are also sceptics, like the foul mouthed Venkamma. His own mother is much concerned about Moorthys mixing with the low caste pariahs. Indeed, when someone spreads the rumour that the Swami the priest; upholder of dharma has threatened the villagers with excommunication if Moorthy continues to go around with the pariahs, Naraamma is terribly upset; she sobs and shivers and soon dies.

He has to resist orthodoxy at the social level, and at the political level he has to fight the British authority symbolized by the Skeffington Coffee Estate and the police inspector Bade Khan who is out to suppress any undercurrent of Gandhian movement in Kanthapura. Moorthy's efforts bear fruit and the village changes. Rao is careful to point out that the transformation occurs through a complex dynamism negotiated through tradition and change, as the village affiliates itself to wider nationalistic cause.

The British find their ally in Swami, who supports them as upholders of dharma and is rewarded with "twelve hundred acres of wet land" by the Government. Meanwhile Moorthy's message spreads far and wide and several private temples are thrown open to the untouchables.

Rao does not marginalize the role of women in the freedom movement and highlights their individual contributions. Rangamma and Ratna form women's volunteer groups, despite opposition from the orthodox. Moorthy and his volunteers closely monitor the Mahatma's Dandi march and enact their own satyagraha in Kanthapura. They picket toddy shops, and are joined by more volunteers from the city, and by the coolies from the Skeffington Coffee Estate. Their march is opposed by the police who beat them up mercilessly. The police tell them to be loyal to the British Government, but the people say they know only the Government of the Mahatma.

Moorthy and several others are arrested. As a result of the police atrocities the entire village is desolate and, in the end, "there remains neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura".

Kanthapura has been described as the most satisfying of all modern Indian novels. Recognized as a major landmark in Indian fiction, it is the story of how the Gandhian struggle for Independence came to one small village in south India.

"There is more to Raja Rao's book than a morality tale. It is written in an elegant style verging on poetry; it has all the content of an ancient Indian classic, combined with a sharp satirical wit and a clear understanding of the present. The author's extensive notes will prove invaluable to the general reader."

However, the mythic consciousness is not conveyed through the language of a single character like Moolthy in Kanthapura or that of Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart. All the characters, major and minor, through their address to gods and men participate through multiple voices in the creation of a mythic language with their distinctive tone of politeness or deference. The use of similar sentence openings in Kanthapura provides an incantatory effect to the language. Rao created an idiom that was independent yet autochthonous. The word order corresponds to the vernacular: speech pattern. Songs Gom the religious and folk tradition play an important role in the language of both Achebe and Raja Rao.

"The entire novel Kanthapura is structured symphonically" says C.D. Narasimhaiah, "music and poeby are built into Indian life and our entire tradition literary, intellectual and folk-is suffused with poetry and song so much so it has come to be the natural rhythm of our life" . In both Things Fall a part ánd Kanthapura one could find the employment of songs as expressions of judgement. The following song for instance is purposefully ambiguous yet powerful in denigrating the whiteman. Kohna of the ash buttocks He is fit to be a slave. The whiteman has no sense He is fit to be a slave.

Another song relates to the mythic presence of the Mahatma who is glorified as a king who can turn poison into nectar. Our King he was born on a wattle-mat, He's not the King of the velvet bed, He's small and he's round and he's bright and he's sacred, Mahatma, Mahatma, You're our king, and we are your slaves.

These songs are expressions or responses of a particular historical situation. This interposing of songs provide a cohesion to the narrative, and transpose the language into a timeless stream. The patterns of language in both novelists, Achebe and Rao establish a correlation between language and the mythic substratum in the respective cultural contexts. C.D. Narasimhaiah comments: The words become images,

images fusing into myths, myths manifesting as symbols, and all organising the material of the novel into a rich and complex presentation. A word, a phrase, an analogy, a dialogue form, even an unsuspected rhythm may take the reader back and forth in the attempt to perceive the hidden pattern.

For instance: O Kenchamrna! IProtect us always like this through famine and disease, death and despair. O most high and bounteous! We shall offer you our first rice and our first fruit and we shall offer you saris and bodicc cloth. . . .

Thus mythic language in Kanthauura. The Seruent and the Roue as well as Things Fall Apart and how of God is an important constituent of the form of the novel as myth. Rao's attitude to language is well summarised in the following words of Ramaswamy in The Seruent and the Rope. These words light up the atmosphere in the narrative, which contributes to the understanding of the text as well as the author's aesthetics:

> The style of a man- the way he weaves word against word intricates the existence of' sentences with the values of sound, makes a coma there and a dash here - all are signs of his inner movement the speed of his life, his breath, the nature of his thought, the ardour and age of his soul; short sentences and long sentences, parenthesis and points of' interrogation are only curves in the architecture of thought but has an intimate, aprivate relation with your navel, your genitals, the vibrarnce of your eyesight.

One can easily see that for Rao, language is the link between the mundane and the sacred; speech for him, is mantra. Repetitive speech or sound has the power of mantra, which irnparls a mythic quality to his language. Images such as Ganges, Himalayas, or Siva, Parvati, Yagnavalkya, Krishna are repeated to act as central images of the mythic land of India in the novel. In Raja Rao's novels, language is the link between the mundane and the sacred, with the various images of gods, metaphors, similes, and symbols which fulfill certain basic functions: like serving as a major device of characterisalion or creation of atmosphere.

The novels of Chinua Achebe and Raja Rao demand a critical perception based on a characteristic sensibility that belongs to the Third World novelists in particular in order to appreciate their essentially mythic consciousness operating at the thematic as well as narrative levels. An extensive analysis of the vision and aesthetics of these two novelists, their faith in the role of cultural tradition, treatment of themes, narrative techniques and style relating to myths and motifs in the practice of the novel as literary form can help gain a deeper knowledge of the genre itself at the ontological level. The strength of these two writers stems from a fictional mode founded on amythic apprehension of Reality, a characteristic trait fundamental to the cultural traditions of the respective geographical areas within the Third World.

The fundamental problem faced by the Third World novelist writing in English is to choose between the values of a mythic tradition and the competitive western system based on scientfic rationalism in order to evolve a world view to meet the challenges of contemporary life. Both Chinua Achebe and Raja Rao, by reworking on a western model, fictionalize the fundamental urge in man to fill the *gap* between mythical thought and contempomy life. The novels under consideration Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God, Raja Rao's Kanthapura and The Serpent and the Rope are designated as 'Novel as myth', for they create an atmosphere of myth by appropriate strategies in narration.

The concerns for comparison are not the contents of the Afiican and Indian mythologies or the structural similarity of the novels to classical myths. The significant areas of comparison in this study include the ontological priorities in vision, the representation of mythic time, the mythic configuration through archetypal characters situations and images, the hidden cultural paradigms, the philosophy and technique of the process of Naming as a literary device, the working of the sacred and the profane as conceptualised through fiction, and also the culture specific discourse strategies adopted. By locating these novels in a realm where myth and literature meet and interact, a comparative study of the unique narrative strategies adopted by these two novelists opens up possibilities for discovering a space free from neo-colonialist influences.

Chapter I provides an introduction to the approach adopted in this study by explairling the meaning of the term myth and how it relates itself to any literary narrative. The conrlnoli cultural concerns in the cultural traditions of India and Nigeria and the shaled experience of colonialism provide justification for the selection of these two writers for a comparative study. The unique Third Worldtan' perspective in the technique of narration place their novels in an intellectual space that could validate the significance of a distinctive Afio-Asian narrative tradition. The intersections of a literary narrative and a mythical narrative are mentioned enumerating the general features of a novel that could be considered as myth. The content, function fonn and context of a novel has to be taken up for analysis to prove that it fulfills the criteria for a novel, as myth.

Chapter II discusses in detail the thematic aspects or the content of the narrative that assumes the quality and status of myth. These narratives by relating the collective consciousness of the clan or the unconscious wisdom of tradition, present cultural history as myth which is embedded in the respective traditions.

Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God, and Kanthapura depict social life in an environment of socio-polltical insecurity which encourages a return to the mythic. It is the depiction of the operation of the sacred in the profane in these novels that lend them the status of mythified history. The term history is used here not in the sense of chronological events in the past, but as a record of the collective responses to the socio-political experience of the past. The protagonists Moorthy in Kanthapura or Kamaswamy in The Serpent and the Rope who respond to contemporary history bear with them the stamp of ancient India. In Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, history is the hero with the protagonists Okonkwo and Ezeulu paticipating in the necessities of Ibo history, largely sharing the aspirations of the villagers. Story or action is of secondary importance. These novels of Achebe and Raja Kao, present us with the m e history of these nations from the inside by mythicising the collective experience.

Chapter III focusses on the archetypal patterns, characters and images which help to attain a keener insight into the meaning of the texts. The archetypal cultural paradigms like the Male Pnnciple and the Female Principle, *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, come up for discussion along with the archetypal nature of the protagonists like Moorthy or Ramaswamy. The archetypal patterns of behaviour in both cultures are manifested in the novels through rituals, patterns of behaviour and also through symbols that relate man's existence to that of the gods. For instance the corporate nature of the Ibo and South Indian cultural environment are well reflected in the character of Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart and Moorthy in Kanthapura respectively. The guru archetype in the cultural tradition of India finds a very significant place in the structure of Raja Rao's novels. The guru-disciple paradigm is a recurrent aspect of characterisation in Raja Rao's novels, Kanthapura, The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare, Comrade Kirillov and The Chessmaster and His Moves.

Chapter IV is devoted to a discussion of these novels asmyth at the narrative level. The traditional concepts of time and the various linguistic devices used in the formulation of a myhc language are examined. The African and Indian concepts about Time are discussed and we see in the numerous rituals and ceremonies the operation of a mythic time or sacred time, rather than the presence of profane time which is related to the ordinary phenomenal aspects of life. The implicit disregard for the linear progression of time as found in these novels testify to the concept of mythic tirrle operating in the respective cultural traditions. The names of characters, in the four novels with mythic associations attached to them help in the creation of atmosphere. The names carry with them many layers of cultural or mythical information in both Achebe and Raja Rao.

The last chapter summarises the argument that these two novelists, through their unique narrative strateges help to reveal the structure and function of mythcal thought in the respective societies. This study further validates the hypothesis that comparative studies of the narrative, lingwstic strategies of writers from within the Third World will help to broaden our understanding of the past as well as the prescnt. Broader questions like the relevance of the non-western rhetorical resources adopted by these writers in the context of post-coloniality can also be addressed in a future investigation. The literary concerns of these two writers from Africa and Asia, as seen in these novels, highlight the commonality of spirit which could be tenned "Third-Worldian".

5

The Metaphysical Concerns in Raja Rao

This Universe of ours, the universe of senses, the rational, the intellectual is bounded on both sides by the illimitable and the unknowable. Herein are the enquiries, herein are the facts. This search has been in the human mind, as I believe, from the very beginning of humanity (Vivekananda, 1979:1). Man has indeed from time immemorial, been wondering about the creation of the Universe and the nature of existence therein. Sages and Rishis of the past tried to discover the Ultimate Truth and to know more about the mysteries of life. Some tried to see God amidst human beings, others renounced the world to meditate on the Absolute. Different perceptions and conceptions have resulted in a number of theories and interpretations.

In India, the Vedas and the Upanishads, which speak about the spiritual experiences of the sages, form the basis of many Hindu philosophies such as the Mimamsa, the Samkhya, the Vedanta, the Advaita, and the Visistadvaita etc. Each new philosophy modifies or builds on the previous philosophy. There is, for example, the Mimamsa theory, which says that, "the world has ever been running the same without any new creation or dissolution, Srsti or Pralaya" (Das Gupta,1975: 403), and argues elaborately for the rejection of God. The Samkhya philosophy talks about the duality of existence, nature and souls and nothing about God.

The Vedantins consider that the analysis of the Samkhyas is imperfect and argue for the existence of God. Advaitins argue that the Jeevatma and the Parmatma are one and the same and that this fact could be realized only when one overcomes illusions. The Visishtadvaita theory modifies Advaita and says that there is the Lord and that he is manifest everywhere and in everyone. The Dvaitins, on the other hand hold a different view. They believe that God who is the creator of the universe and its ruler is eternally separate from the human soul. According to them, nature and the souls become manifest and undergo change but God remains the same.

Man's pilgrimage as a quester, then, has not come to an end. The quester now has the advantage of the collected wisdom of generations before him. He goes from one philosophy to the other, from one theory to the other till his questions are answered.

This quest for the Ultimate Truth finds expression in the novels and short stories of Raja Rao and L.S.Ramamirtham. The primordial questions of existence and surmises on the nature of the Absolute form a major part of their works.

Descending from Brahmin families with spiritual inclinations, their way of thinking has been moulded by the surroundings. They are alike in their philosophical sensibility and are perturbed by questions about the real and the unreal, body and soul, life and death. The reader can find in their works an intense desire to grasp the real nature of the Absolute and a persistent attempt to know the Ultimate Truth.

Raja Rao and L.S.Ramamirtham are indeed *sadhakas* in search of Truth and they share with the readers the experiences of their spiritual journey. Their works reveal the different stages of their spiritual evolution. Both of them have received with an open mind the knowledge they could get from different philosophies.

Acclaimed as a philosophical writer, Raja Rao has received high critical praise for extending the scope of prose fiction by using it as a medium to give shape to his philosophical speculations. K.R.Rao rightly points out that, "Raja Rao treks the vast terrains of metaphysics and adds a lost dimension to the world's fiction", and C. D. Narasim haiah appreciates the "range of knowledge" that is exhibited in his fiction: He is perhaps the first Indian who brings to the business of novel writing a wide intellectual culture, Vedas, Upanishads, Buddha, Sankara and Coomaraswamy jostle with Cathars, the Holy Grail, Dante, Rilke,Paul Valery, Cezanne, Mark, Gide and Romain Rolland.

The novel form gave enough room for a serious writer like Raja Rao to express his doubts and convictions. Raja Rao writes about himself thus:

> "For me literature is a sadhana, not a profession, but a vocation. My writing is mainly the consequence of the metaphysical life, what I mean by sadhana".

Raja Rao's novels, hence, should be considered as an expression of his quest for Truth and in them the readers get the essence of his philosophical knowledge. "The philosophical was with me always",' says Raja Rao in an interview. In his constant search for Truth, he read widely and deeply.

After his education in India, Raja Rao went to France to pursue Doctoral studies on the impact of Indian thinking on the West. Thus having acquired the knowledge of French and Indian philosophies he could talk about both authentically. His depth in Indian philosophy is revealed in his works. Raja Rao's novels are enigmatic and complex for a reader who is not acquainted with those philosophical concepts. He quotes from almost all the Hindu philosophical and religious texts from the Upanishads, from the texts on Samkhya philosophy, Advaita, Sankara's works and Buddhist texts frequently and from the great Hindu legends, the Ramayana and the

Mahabharata to support his arguments. In his works, there is an exposition of the Advaitic, Visishtadvaitic and Tantric doctrines.

The influence of Ramayana, Mahabharafa, the philosophy of Sri Sankara and the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa can be seen in the works of L. S. Ramamirtham also. He mentions the works of Tolstoy, the Life of Gandhi, the style of Hemingway and the stories of Sri Ramakrishna as great influences on his literary art.

He thinks that the life of his ancestors could have been the background for his quest. He also narrates the mystic experiences of some of his ancestors and feels that these mystic events could have influenced him. He says that there was a "streak of abnormality" about his ancestors. His grandfather and his grandfather's sister were poets. His grandfather's elder brother was reported to have had the Darshan of the Goddess. His grandmother who was illiterate woke up one morning to find herself reciting the lines from the Upanishads and the Vedas in Sanskrit. All these mystic experiences of his ancestors awakened the spiritual and philosophical questions in him.

However, L.S. Ramamirthamls writing is not saturated with philosophy like that of Raja Rao, but there is an underlying philosophical note in his works. He often slips into philosophy from the main strand and speculates upon the nature of God, expressing the spiritual longing of the individual. He analyses his own writing in the following words:

> What do I write about? I write about the spiritual anguish of the individual where have I come? ... Where do I go ... I write about *Darshans* which seem to guide and then hide; *Darshans* which appear to throw some light along the hazy path of Jeeva, the confusions, sufferings, the anguish experienced by Jeeva in the effort to realise itself.

Thus, both these writers have given expression to their spiritual yearning and to their philosophical consciousness in their works. Raja Rao's long stay in France also had its impact on him through French thinkers and writers like Paul Valery, Rilke, Mallarme, Andrew Malraux and Romain Rolland. According to Shiv Niranjan: It has helped Raja Rao in making fiction an instrument of spiritual edification. So, he is well equipped with knowledge of two entirely different worlds, India of birth and inheritance and France, the land of his acquisition where he has spent almost equal number of years as in India. The simultaneous awareness of the Indian metaphysical creative mode and the French way of fictional expression makes him an heir of two worlds.

However, as Curtis observes, Raja Rao has retained his individuality in spite of influences: "This fundamental Indian sensibility Rao has retained through all the influences which might have affected a lesser writer".

The philosophical attitude of Raja Rao is discernible in all his novels. From Kanthapura to The Cat *and* Shakespeare there is a steady progress in the journey of the quester. In fact, the protagonists in his novels are most often questers and represent the different stages a sadhaka undergoes in his spiritual journey. The novels are to be considered autobiographical in that sense, since they exhibit the writer's own spiritual yearnings and his quest. Raja Rao has said in an interview, "everything one writes is autobiographical, but they are all metaphysical". His novels present the conflicts of the quester, how by experiencing life and questioning, he gradually progresses in the process of realization. As Srinivasa Iyengar puts it, "All his writing is a part of Raja Rao's Sadhana or spiritual experience and so Kanthapura, The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespere should be viewed as steps or paths towards realization".

Kanthapura, his first novel, is political. It narrates how the freedom struggle came to Kanthapura, a south Indian village and how the Gandhian movement spread there. Moorthy, the protagonist imparts the messages of Gandhi to the people of his village. Though the novel is basically political, it also exhibits the philosophical sensibility of the writer. Moorthy is inspired not only by Gandhi's non-violence movement, but also by his spiritual strength. He equates Gandhi to God by comparing Gandhi to Rama, and the British rule to Ravana's rule. He arranges *Harikathas* to convey the importance of the struggle for independence to the people of *Kanthapura*.

The gradual evolution in Moorthy's character is shown in his attempts to control his superstitions and mingle with members of all communities. Moorthy's admiration for Gandhi and Gandhism reflects Raja Rao's admiration for Gandhi's principles. As Gajendra Kumar points out "Gandhi is of the view that politics and religion are inextricably mated together. *Kanthapura* evinces the divine truth that man's status in the society is spiritual as much as it is political".

Quest of a different level can be perceived in Padmanabha Iyer, the central character of *Comrade Kirillov*. He is torn between the admiration for Communism and for Gandhian principles of non-violence. He believes that the principle of non-violence will not help the Indians. He is unhappy that the Indians are passive and feels that they can not succeed in getting freedom mainly because of these principles. At the same time, he is not able to forget his *Vedantic* past. According to Shiv Niranjan, "Kirillov's inclination towards Marxism and his conflict reflect the writer's own conflict regarding the political methods of East and West, the protagonist's development and his keen interest in exploring the spiritual mysteries of human condition. And O. P.Mathur points out that Raja Rao's spiritual concern is more pronounced in this novel: "Raja Rao is "inclined to believe that man has an inner being which stands beyond the grasp of human intelligence. Raja Rao, like Dostoyevsky, seems to insist on the need for a harmony between the material and the spiritual, the rational and the vital". In *The Serpent and the Rope,* which he wrote with the blessings of his spiritual guru Sri Atmananda, Raja Rao has moved from politics to philosophy. Rama, the protagonist, is a *Vedantin.* His views on birth, marriage, man-woman relationship and death show the influence of *Vedanta,* particularly the *Advaitic* principle. Rama's quest for the Ultimate Truth and his views reflect the author's views on life and his quest.

Rama's statement, "Some deep absence grew in me like a coconut on a young tree" and his question, "Life is a pilgrimage I know, but a pilgrimage to here and of what" and his harrowing statement, "there is nobody to go now, no home, no city, no climate, no age" and "who are you? whose; whence have you come?" clearly bring out the spiritual quest of Raja Rao and the eternal agony of mankind in looking for identity. Rama is ever in a mood for philosophical speculation or discussion. Every small event provokes him to think on the nature of existence.

Hedge identifies two patterns in literary works with quest motif, based upon the method in which the quest is presented "the pattern of exile and the Kingdom" and "the Paradigm of Egoistic self and enlightenment". In the first pattern, the hero is forced to leave his kingdom and in the second, the hero undertakes it on his own. Many of the modern novels with the quest theme are in the second pattern. *The Serpent and the Rope* also has the paradigm of Egoistic self and enlightenment.

According to Hedge, "The *Serpent and the Rope* is a novel of discovery of the *Guru.* All the same, the pattern here is similar to the pattern suggested in Dharmaraja's *Mahaprasthana* - i.e., the hero frees himself from all temporal ties one by one".

Rama, the protagonist, gradually frees himself from what is not real and progresses towards Reality. Though his Little Mother frees him from family duties, he thinks of his responsibilities as a brother and visits India, whenever his presence is needed in the family for his father's obsequies, for his sister's marriage etc. He gets entagled in Savithri-Pratap's affair, which ends up in his own admiration and love for Savithri. Rama, feels that Savithri would be his ideal partner. But being practical, allows Savithri to marry Pratap and frees himself from that entanglement. Rama is freed from marital ties also by his wife because of the incompatibility between the two. Thus Rama reaches a stage where he is all by himself and thinks of the nature of life. His longing for the Absolute is so intense that he wishes to go to his *Guru,* who will show him the path for ultimate Truth.

The Cat and Shakespere, in the author's own statement is a sequel *to The Serpent and the Rope.* It is a metaphysical comedy. In the words of M.K.Naik: If *The Serpent and the Rope* presents this quest as an arduous journey on the razor's edge, *The Cat and Shakespere* exhibits it as going across the 'wall' of limited finite knowledge and finding oneself in a garden all rosy and gentle as Pai does. In this novel Raja Rao expounds the *Visishtadvaita* the *Bhakti Marga* of Sri Ramanuja. Govindan Nair observes that one should adopt the way of the "kitten" and surrender to the "mother cat" (The Absolute). In *The* Serpent *and the* Rope, Rama is in search of a Guru: "Lord, Lord, my Guru, come to me, tell me, give me thy touch, Vouchsafe" I cried, "the vision of Truth. Lord my Lord".

In *The Cat and Shakespeare* Ramakrishna Pai finds his Guru in Govindan Nair. Govindan Nair teaches absolute faith to Ramakrishna Pai. Thus, as Srinivasa Iyengar rightly observes Raja Rao has "moved from *Karma* in *Kanthapura* to *Gnana* in *The Serpent and the Rope* and to *Bhakti-prapatti* in *The Cat and Shakespeare*" (1980: 107). In *The Chess Master and his Moves* also, the protagonist Sivarama, the mathematician is in search of the Absolute and Self-identity. He questions and analyses himself. He, through mathematical analogies tries to interpret life, tries to grasp the nature of the Absolute, but fails in his attempt:

Thus if I take my life here to be a positive integer, my non- existence becomes a negative integer. Can anything really die? No. Things change, they are transformed but the essence is indestructible. What then is Jayalakshmi? A genetic formula. An equationthat, like Ramanujan's, comes clearly from the Goddess. Then who is the Goddess? A para-genetic formula. And who then is the Goddess of Godesses? The answer seemed to recede at every step.

He tries to analyse the inexplicable and the mysterious and thought leading to thought wonders whether the life is worth living at all:

> I often wondered who I was and what I was about. Was I an Indian at all with the over-questioning, over worked mind but then my Vedic ancestors too had questioned everything, from water and fire to God himself. Did he exist: and if he did, did he know he existed? yes, that was the question: That zero existed was no doubt true but did zero know it existed was the prime problem. If zero were sunya, and so nirvana, and did nirvana know it was nirvana, and who was there (for there is no who in nirvana), then how does anyone know one is in nirvana? If not what? the problem was so intellectually terrifying to me.

In his journey of life, Sivarama comes across many people-Michael, Ratilal, Mireille, Suzanne, Jayalakshmi and others and his encounter with them results in his self evaluation: "All one needs is the sword like sincerity of Gautama. How far I am from that Jaya", and they help him to "turn inward" in his search for the Truth.

The chasm between the ideal and the actual in Sivarama is wide thus resulting in his exploration of the nature of existence: Where so ever I start I come back to the same space, and even more curious, the same time. The time I seem to twist and slip and return to seems so much a game of numbers, infinity when looked at, even once, suddenly contracts like a mud worm and curls into nothingness.

Hence, he ruminates on the dissolution of the Self. "The true hero, he who looks inward for knowledge, for dissolution, the other, he who would know objects thus the alien *l'estranger*, the foreigner. And so the limp".

Thus, his novels *Kanthapura, Comrade Kirillov, The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare* and, *The Chess Master and his Moves* represent the different stages in the spiritual evolution of the writer and they present different approaches to the Ultimate Reality. Thus from Gandhism to Communism from Communism to religion, from the physical to the metaphysical, the *sadhaka* moves on to the Ultimate Truth. For as Rama says in *The Serpent and the Rope:*

> Marxism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Hitlerism, the British Common Wealth, the Republic of the United States of America all are so many names for some unknown principle which we feel but cannot name. For all the roads as the *Gita* says lead but to the Absolute.

This quest for Truth is discernible in all his novels. Not only the protagonists but also the other characters show some philosophical consciousness. In *The Serpent and the Rope,* the Little Mother, though not an intellectual, says, "Birth and death are the illusions of the non-self'. She is philosophical in her attitude. Madeleine, Rama's French wife, also reads different philosophies and often enters into an argument with Rama. She herself is drawn towards Buddhism which separates her and Rama. Savithri is also interested in philosophy and admires Rama's intellect.

Similarly in The Cat and Shakespeare, both Ramakrishna Pai and Govindan Nair are on the same wavelength. In The Chess Master and his *Moves* again, all the other characters are philosophically conscious and they provide support to the quest of the central character.

This quest for Truth is discernible even in his short stories. A careful reader could notice metaphysical overtones even in casual conversations as in "The cow of the Barricades", where there is philosophical colouring in the master's description of the cow.

'Master can you tell us who this cow may be?' 'She may be my baton armed mother-in-law. Though she may be the mother of one of you. Perhaps she is the Great Mother's Vehicle'.

A greater depth can be found in the short stories "India-A Fable" and "The Policeman and The Rose", which are symbolic. In "India - A Fable", there is a fusion of fact and fantasy. The conversation between the boy and the narrator is symbolic where "the westerner's world of romantic illusion is pitted against a vision of the quintessential metaphysical India in which romance is made a pathway to reality" (Naik, 1982: 114-5). *The Policeman and theRose* is highly symblic and the changing identity of symbols result in obscurity. The main theme however is realisation of self. Every indivudual is arrested the moment he is born by the Policeman "ego" and when he frees himself from "ego" he realises the "self' in him and is "free". Raja Rao's metaphysical enquiry continues in *On the Ganga Ghat, a* collection of short stories where he ponders over the mysterious nature of life and expresses his feeling through different characters. In the first story, the narrator observes: Life is so mysterious. Why should you coolie with a number 87, 54 or 49 - stitched on your shirt alone carry our luggage? Why not one whose number is 55,31 or 48? What connection of stars linking one with the other, Jupiter with Mercury or Saturn squaring the moon created this situation that Bhaiya Ram, Bhagat Ram or Durga das, coolies of Mughal Sarai carry our luggage and never will we see them again?

Again, in the same book, in another story, the narrator turns philosophical while mentioning the death of Muthradas:

He had not yet discovered the true similarity between the walking state and the dream state but there are still so many life cycles to come. Man goes where he has to go but one day he'll arrive where there's no going or returning. A car can always take you to the Railway Station. You don't need (or do you) a car to go to yourself? No.

A subtle expression of this philosophical quest could be found in the novels and short stories of L.S.Ramamirtham also. In most of his novels the protagonists are questers and they reflect the spirtual and philosophical consciousness of the author. In his Kal Cirikkiratu (The stone smiles), Priyaccittam (Atonement), Kaluku (The Eagle) and Apit, the protagonists are often engaged in self-evaluation and metaphysical speculation. In all these four novels, the protagonists leave the house, because of various circumstances and have diverse experiences, which mould them and improve their understanding. These novels have the quest in the pattern of "Egoistic self and enlightenment" mentioned earlier in the chapter. In Kal Cirikkiratu, Tarmarjan is frustrated by the attitude of his wife, who wants her daughter to become a dancer and takes her away with her without his permission.

Disillusioned, he leaves his home, resigns his job and wanders aimlessly, when he meets Komati, the stenographer who had worked with him earlier. Having come to know about Kamati irresponsible husband, her monetary position and her debts, he decides to help her. He, however, adopts a wrong way. He steals the jewels from the pawn broker, imagining he got the smile of approval from the Goddess Kamal. However, later, when arrested by the police he realizes that it was his own intention that made him imagine that he had the consent of the Goddess. Tarmariijan wonders at each stage why such events take place in his life and why he is being driven like that, "How I wanted to float without committing myself to anything in life and what is happening to me now". He feels that it is the very nature of life: "Reason? No need of any reason. Running itself is enough for being chased. If I don't understand that this is the philosophy of life, who is to be blamed?". As he walks with the aim of committing suicide, he ponders over the nature of death: "What happens after death? There have been thousands of arguments and counter arguments. Yet all these remain only guess work", and he muses:

> Does life abruptly come to an end as the kindled candle is stopped? Or is the soul received by something else when it leaves the body? Or is it like the incense stick whose fragrance starts only after the flame is blown out? Does the real life begin only after death?

Initiated by his father's elder brother who sows the seed of spiritual aspiration in him he often thinks about the power beyond us. Likewise, in his *Kaluku* also the central character, Ampi, is driven from place to place and he reflects on how even without his willingness he stays back and gradually gets committed:

> I keep thinking that I should not have come here. But I keep on weaving the web on myself and get more entangled and continue to stay in the same place. But who has really any place to go? We stay in the same place and get buried there day by day.

He also realises that in this involvement one's identity is lost. His search for identity is revealed in the following lines: "I am searching for my place in the dots of 'Kislam'. The dots are searching for me". And he expresses his dismay and puzzle about his situation and wonders who could be held responsible for his condition:

> Dance of fate
>
> All the dancers are in mask
>
> Still I know two persons in them
>
> My parents

In his *Kiraattil Enkii* also the father retires to a remote village in Kerala in order to practise detachment. Here again, as in The Serpent *and the* Rope, the protagonist tries to free himself from all ties. In all these novels the protagonists set out in anger, or protest or disillusionment and then are mellowed by experience.

Slightly different from these novels is *Apita* where the protagonist Ampi, who leaves *Karafimalai,* when he was young visits again the place in his old age. The narrator first mistakes Apita for Cakku, who was his childhood companion and the girl he loved in his teens. Apita is her daughter who is now as old as she was, when he had left the village. He soon realizes his mistake. However, he feels that Cakku has come back as Apita and in spite of his self control, age etc, he cannot turn his eyes and thought away from Apita. The writer has tried to erase the distinction between past and present. The poignant memories and heartfelt expressions are followed by his philosophical contemplation:

> Cakku, you did not go anywhere. In my stupidity I went from place to place. But where did I go? I am here as an evidence for the fact that I did not really go anywhere.

And the narrator while going behind Apita thinks of God-human relationship. He tells himself, "You go, and I follow. Even God wants only this", "surrender yourself unto me", "When I give myself to you, how light I feel now".

This quest for the Absolute and Self-identity can be perceived in the short-stories of L. S. Ramamirtham also. In his short-stories the characters are often speculative. Literate or illiterate, young or old, they generally tend to philosophise in whatever situation they are. In a short story named "*Mayamana* (Illusive deer), the father says:

> Have we learnt everything that we should know about our body? Is it possible to learn all that? But

> for surmises and arguments do we know for sure, what happens before birth or after death? Do we know about the real nature of the soul that functions between birth and death?

In another story, "Raja Rani" (The King and the Queen) which is patterned like a fable, where the queen is materialistic and interested in ruling the kingdom and exercising power, the king becomes a Rishi. The narrator intervenes in this part of the story and philosophises: "What do we leave? Where do we go? What do we wait for? Yet we wait".

Though L. S. Ramamirtham's aim is to paint in words the intensity of feeling of the individual, these descriptions get a philosophical colouring. In "culippukka" (Whirlpool) the father turns philosophical in his conversation with his son. "What is the meaning of ambitions? what is the meaning of life? why did we come? Where are we going? where will it end?" (Tukaci: 99).

His short stories abound in such queries. In a short-story titled "Taricanam" (Darshan) the narrator expresses the feeling that this world of ours is built on illusive words. "Words themselves are illusive deer; the instrument invented for man's backing. Man's paradise stands on that fundamental fear created by words. A false building built on falsehood" (M: 99).

The writer has recorded his struggle in finding the answers. His disillusionment also has found expression in his work.: "I weave my thought, I weave that on myself, without knowing what they are. I get entangled" (Kan: 56). His questions on life, on the Absolute, and on the God-human relationship are reiterated in many places in his short stories. He expresses his doubt as to whether it is possible to have a Darshan of the Absolute howevermuch one meditates. "Even if I do a thousand penances I cannot see Her face to face because Her very nature is like that", and wonders if God is created by human imagination: "Did You evolve Yourself or were You created by my thought?" Thus in the novels of Raja Rao and L. S. Ramamirtham, the protagonists are questers and they echo the surmises of their authors. The difference between the two is only in the presentation of characters and the level of philosophy. L. S. Ramamirtham's protagonists are average individuals, ordinary human beings, experiencing life and they learn to question from their experiences. They are, to some extent, exposed to Hindu philosophy and are aware of Hindu myths and legends. Raja Rao's protagonists, on the other hand, are intellectuals who have a good knowledge of Eastern and Western philosophies (Rama, Sivarama). However, the same primordial questions about life are raised by both in their works.

Vedanta has been the guiding light for both of them in their quest for the knowledge of the beyond. Their works exhibit their deep-rootedness in *Vedanta.* No wonder, born in a country where *Vedantic* notions have permeated through religion and culture into every day life and have shaped the very way of thinking, these spiritual aspirants depended mainly on Vedanta. That both of them are basically Vedantins can be perceived from their observations on creations, Brahman, eternity of soul, law of Karma, *Mukti* etc., and also from their opinions on marriage, duties of a person, the different stages in life, the different goals of man, and the different states of man.Rama's statement, "But you can no more improve on *Vedanta,* than improve on Zero" brings out Raja Rao's faith in *Vedanta.* In *Comrade Kirillov,* the narrator when talking to Kirillov, says:

> Vedanta alone has the courage of ultimate-it lovingly uncovers the limits to your own ignorant authority and asks for more inquiry into your biological, psychological and psychic self, delimiting you bit by bit into acute dissolution, when intensified in your desperate anonymity, you surrender yourself, to that which is ever your.

This statement reveals the intensity of the influence of Vedanta. Most of his novels except perhaps the early short stories are characterised by his *vedantic* notions. His short story, *"The Policeman and the Rose"* and the novels *The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare* and *The Chess Master and his Moves* are predominantly philosophical. Raja Rao's views on birth, death, life and marriage are scattered throughout the novel *The Serpent and the Rope.* Rama considers death as unreal. His mother's death, his father's death, his son Pierre's death and even the death of his grandfather's horse evoke in him thoughts about the nature of soul. According to Rama, who was exposed to the *Vedas* even when he was five, death is unreal. He feels that his ancestors did not really die. He says, "I can feel them in me and know they knew they did not die. Who is it that tells me they did not die? Who but me".

The same idea is reiterated when he says, "My father was really dead. But Little Mother smiled. In Benaras one knows death is as illusory as the mist in the morning"; and in the following assurance: "Pierre was never dead. I could feel him in my loins".

According to Rama, the true life, "the true Brahminhood commences when you recognize yourself in eternity. At some moment you must stop life and look into it". Like a true Vedanfin, he believes that death is unreal and hence believes in the continuity of existence.

Consequently, he considers life an illusion. True detachment is possible only when one thinks of life as illusion. Rama quotes from *Rig Veda* "Never at any time am I subject to death and thinks that the only real illusion, *'mrityu'*, 'mara' is Death. Man seeks forever the death of death". He considers existence as "a passage between life and death and birth and death again" and feels that "nothing really dies, even death does not die. All continues, ultimately nothing continues". As he believes in the eternity of soul, he could say with a sense of detachment. "For all we do is really superstition. Was I really called Ramasamy or was Madeleine called Madeleine".

Even in his comparison of *Buddhism* and *Vedanta* he states that for the Buddhists perception is real and that it is not so for the *Vedantisfs*. The author's *Vedantic* notions are discernible in almost every comment of Rama on life, death and existence. He shares the common Hindu belief in *Karma* and *Mukti*.

Rama believes in the immortality of soul, and hence in the continuity of existence:

> Whereas I was born to India, where the past and the present are forever knit into one whole experience going down the Ganges who could not imagine the Compassionate One Himself coming down the footpath, by the Sarayu to wash the mendicant bowl.

According to Bhattacharya, "This sense of continuity in Rama was the result of his sense of unity of the whole creation. Every person orthing has its place in time and space, all parts of the whole and transposition is possible only if the spirit accepts".

Similar ideas are expressed by Sivarama in *The Chess Master and his Moves*. He feels that one does not have any true identity, as the identity keeps changing. He says, "When someone at the Institute's desk or indeed any mathematical society's meeting asked 'Monsieur, what are you called?', I wanted to say I don't know" and elsewhere in the novel he says:

> In India, of course, you had a name according to the stars but born again and again you had ten to the power of ten names. And again, according to Sivarama, everybody lives in pre-history, his story only the unrecognized connection of not one but how many lives, how many intermingling of genes,

> of how many bombardments of particulars terrestrial, extra terrestrial, of how many births and deaths and deaths again and of births.

Thus Raja Rao's metaphysical notions are essentially *Vedantic*. But Raja Rao subscribes to the *Advaita Vedanta* of Sri Sankara and unfolds its conceptualization in his works. In his interview with Ranvir Rangra, Raja Rao says that he is committed to *Advaita*. "I cannot say about others. But I am committed to *Advaita Vedanta*. I am a *sadhaka*".

The *Advaitic* notions of illusion and reality, the realisation of the self within, the greatness of the *Guru* and rituals and practices that spring from these ideas, can be discerned in all the three philosophical novels – *The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare* and *The Chess Master and his MovesJ* and also in his short story. *The Policeman and the Rose.*

This question of illusion and reality is in fact the main theme of *The Serpent and the Rope* .There is a fable in *The Serpent and the Rope* about Radha crossing the river Jamuna. "Krishna asks Radha to cross the river by saying, 'Krishna, the *brahmachari* wishes that way be made". She returns after feeding Durvasa and is asked by Durvasa to cross the river saying, "Durvasa who is ever in *upavasa* says 'open and let me pass"'. Radha observes sadly what a lie the world is. Krishna comforts her by saying, "the world, my dear, is not a lie but an illusion", and enlightens her by asking whether she is talking about the body or the soul.

This story, as Shyamala Narayan observes, is "a good means of expressing the central concept of Advaita. The world is a sphere of cosmic illusion which ceases to exist only for the person who has reached illumination". The novel is interspersed with many fables and mythological stories which reinforce the writer's view. Rama Says, "The world is either unreal or real the serpent or the rope. There is no in between the two and all that's between is poetry, is sainthood", implying that as long as a man lives in illusion, he cannot see reality and once he sees reality, he'll never believe in illusion and that only a *Guru* can show the right path and help him to overcome illusion. "The *Guru* brings you *the* lantern.

The road is seen, the long white road with statutory stars, It is only the rope So, he decides to go to his *Guru* in Travancore. For in him the urge for the *Guru* who will show the Ultimate Truth is intense. Thus, the *sadhaka* gives a place of honour for *Guru*. Vivekananda says, "without faith, humility, submission and veneration in our hearts towards our religious teacher, there cannot be any growth of religion in us".

Raja Rao upholds the *Advaitic* principles in his *The Cat and Shakespeare* also. Govindan Nair broods over the uncertainty of life and the nature of death, when Sridhar his son dies. Life is uncertain and death comes when we least expect it. "But I ask you, will death come and say, May I come dear Sir?".

The *Advaitic* notion that, when a man gives up the obsession with the self and the illusion of ego, he overcomes death is expressed in the following lines. "To die is fanciful. Reality is when you die really, Sridhar's death is my joke". The phenomenal nature of the world has been brought out in queries like, "Is there seeing first or the object first?" and in observations like, "to die rightly is to wake and find one has ever been being". The novel is highly symbolic. The writer has tried to concretize by the use of symbols the abstract metaphysical notions. The story of the hunter and the *bilva* tree suggests that "the possibility of a sudden undeserved blessing is strong and ever present if one is willing to yield control of one's life to the divine".

Ramakrishna Pai, follows the cat, and crosses the wall and reaches the garden and is blessed with a vision. The writer here suggests that even without initiation, even without attaining the knowledge (as mentioned in *Advaitic* texts) necessary for realization, one can have revelation, if he

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surrenders with absolute faith. Ramakrishna Pai is blessed with a vision and after this things are different for him. The ego is erased and the attachment to the self is destroyed and he is able to understand Govindan Nair's sense of detachment. The writer has, in this metaphysical novel, incorporated the *Bhaktivada* of Sri Ramanuja and *Advaita* of Sri Sankara in an ingenious manner. Raja Rao advocates absolute faith and complete surrender like that of a kitten to the mother cat.

However, he doesn't accept the *Visishtadvaitic* notion of the world. According to the *Visishtadvaitins* perception is real and they believe in the absolute reality of the theistic Godhead. Raja Rao, however, considers life a superimposition on reality and as Shyamala Narayan points out: *Advaita* does not identify the Absolute which it considers *"nirguna* (without any qualities) with any one deity; the personal God, *Isvara* is only,*"Brahman* as it appears when viewed in the relative ignorance of maya has. *Advaita* giving all deities the same degree of reality (or unreality) is the more catholic system better suited to the novelist's temperament (1988: 88).

His *The Policeman and the Rose* also deals with the *Advaitic* theme of illusion and reality. It speaks about the ego and the self within. It is the Story of the individual in search of the Absolute. S. C. Harrex calls it a pilgrimage story:

> I would argue, neverthless that *"The Policeman and* the Rose" is in the typological romance mode of the God hero in a quest or pilgrimage story, because the symbolic and surreal narrative traces the hero's aspiration and destiny towards the realization of God in self.

The Chess *Master and His Moves,* a voluminous novel, is highly philosophical like his other works and deals with a mathematician's spiritual quest. Like Rama in The *Serpent and the* Rope, Sivarama is constantly engaged in the search for Truth. His mind dwells on the Ultimate Reality wherever or with whomever he is. Criticised for its "prolixity, tediousness and repetitiousness", the novel is an ambitious effort to go deeper into Advaita philosophy and analyse it in comparison with other Hindu philosophies. As Esha Dey points out: The real conflict accordingly is not between the East and the West but between the two world views which determine the two races of men, 'Those that look the horizontal way, the way of infinity. And those that look vertically, the creatures of dissolution, the zero way' ... The Hindu is identified with the vertical and the Hebraic with the horizontal, 'historylessness or chronicling: Krishna or Moses'. Gradually the horizontal group expands considerably to include the whole gamut of the Judaeo, Christian, Islamic thought and Marxism as well as Jainism, Buddhism ... Confucianism ... and other branches of Indian philosophy, even modified non dualism of Ramanuja. The vertical becomes Raja Rao's exclusive Platonic *Advaitic* Indian belief.

The philosophy of *Advaita* is evoked in Sivarama's relationship with women and society. Like Madelein, Suzanne also believes that the world is real and this difference in perception between Suzanne and Sivarama results in the failure of their relationship. In every philosophical discussion, Sivarama tries to uphold the *Advaitic* principles. His statements and his views reveal that he is greatly influenced by the *Advaitic* texts. Sivarama, in conversation with Ratilal says, "If man is not death is not. Thus one lives in eternity or timelessness".

Sivarama speculates in the same vein in another place: So what will you carry and where to? There is no where to go and nothing to happen. To be where you are, the only glory. Being alone is fullness,'purnata' only when you can say you I, are you there, that is here and so nowhere. As the great sage has said what appears is the unreal. What does not disappear, the only Reality.

Such Advaitic notions about Reality, illusion etc., are scattered throughout the novel. Sivarama in his philosophical discussion with Jayalakshmi, while talking of wisdom, is clearly showing the influence of the Advaitic conception of "Gnana":

> You go to the God, to the Saint for help, but wisdom comes to you. It takes planes, trains, buses, even the horse-cart, but it comes to you. Otherwise, like the Sadhus, you go on pilgrimage from the South to the Himalaya and afterwards from Benaras to the Ocean? Seeking your own Sainthood you go to God, but Truth calls you, is You. It says You, You meaning 'I'. So where can I go? but to I. You go far and into God, only to the return to the I.

Like a True Advaitin, he thinks that wherever one goes, one has to turn inward for realizing the self. "Tell me where will 1 truly go-thus too the farthest I go, the more will I return to myself, The self. So tell me where will you truly go". He even thinks that realizing self is like being reborn: "Every man is twice born, a brahmin the first when he is born to his mother and the second when is reborn, into himself, into his own knowledge of the self'.

L. S. Ramamirthamls observations and his questions on creation, God, existence, Karma, illusion, reality etc. show that he is also basically a Vedantist. His description of God echoes the Upanishads. "She is present everywhere; and hence we cannot confine her to one form". And his statement, "The Universe is her mirror" has Advaitic colouring. Like Raja Rao, he believes in the Hindu notions about Karma. Very often the characters, when they suffer, exclaim in their frustration what sin they have committed. He has expressed his faith in Advaita in his interview with Komal Swaminathan "I believe to some extent in the Advaita philosophy", he says. Though it is true that he is not committed to Advaita like Raja Rao and though he thinks he believes in it only to some extent, his writing exhibits a great influence of Advaita on him. As Abi rightly observes, in L. S. Ramamirthamls writing one can find the essence of *Advaitic* philosophy, the notion that, the great soul that has all the souls within is one; even if the events occur at intervals they are connected; however contradictory, the human emotions are the reflection of the great soul in the function of the Universe.

In most of his short stories, he talks about the 'two becoming one. He also believes in the continuity of soul. He says "Janma is a continuous rope of thought. Birth and death are the knots in the rope", In Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope Rama expresses a similar thought: "Existence is a passage between life and death and birth and death again". L. S. Ramamirtham, in his preface to Anjali (Offerings) writes: "Janma is only the change of garment of the Atman". L. S. Ramamirtham expresses his inability to distinguish between "illusion" and "reality" in many of his works. In Apits, the narrator wonders how to resolve this puzzle: "How do we distinguish between illusion and reality in this state of existence where we have lost the mark of identification of the past, present, and future?".

L. S. Ramamirtham also believes in the immortality of soul and continuity of existence. In "Jamatakni", a short story, the father, looking at a funeral pyre, exclaims sorrowfully thinking of his dead son: Is that Pacchu? No. Only am I burning there truly. Not only me, but descending as a seed from the seed, the collective 'I' of all the 'I's that existed and disappeared before me are burning. The collective I of many 'I's is burning.

In the short story *"Nerarika"* his feelings about the continuity of existence are expressed. The narrator thinks: In the chain of lives in which all of us are witness for others how can I separate myself. There is no past, present and future. I consider the soul that departed in the accident as myself and the soul that is born to day and is in the cradle as also myself. In many of his stories, the non-dualistic idea is presented in an implied manner. L. S. Ramamirtham gives the very essence of Advaita in his short story, "Janani": Janani, know this, know 'you, once separated from me, are becoming me. That is why 'I' could be formed in you. The thing that is formless and omnipresent can become a form only from that formlessness. Though formless, they are only parts of the form.

And in his *'Kurukse'tram'*, the *Guru* tells the disciple: Who am I to forgive? Even if I forgive could you get back what is destroyed?, the soul, the one soul pervades all over the Universe-the same soul. Only the forms are different. In the same way in another short story Ant hill the main character who is evil to the core is bitten by a snake and dies. As he is losing his consciousness he asks the approaching death who it is. The answer comes:

> Consider it is the place where you came from and where you have to return. If you are a snake, think that I am a bigger snake that will devour you. Or an eagle; or consider that I am that darkness of the anthill with which once you wanted to merge; or consider that I am the mother bird which shelters its small ones under its wings.

An extension of this imagination and a different sort of unity of the good with goodness could be found in "Eka" .Eka is innocent and God becomes one with her. "Eka, you do not know your greatness. That is your eligibility. You forgot yourself. You were complete in yourself. I became one with you".

L. S. Ramamirtham shares his feelings and thoughts with the reader in his non-fictional writings too. In his *Murcup Perzta TGtal* there is a lot of discussion and speculation about the mysterious nature of life and the Absolute. He tries to describe God in different ways. The intensity of his desire to grasp the real nature of the Absolute has been well expressed in the following lines: "You (God) have pierced every root of my thought like the arrow of Ckalaiva and have fully occupied my thought".

Thus the influence of Vedanta, particularly *Advaita,* can be perceived in the works of these two writers. Both of them fervently believe in the search for the Ultimate Reality and the desire to understand the nature of the Absolute. They accept that Brahman is formless and is not easy to be seen. L. S. Ramamirtham writes: "You permeate through the three nodules of time, past, present and future. But you will not come with in reach".

Raja Rao expresses the same feeling when he says that the impersonal is true. According to Sivarama, "Impersonal alone is fruitful, fruitful towards good". Sivarama, the mathematician, draws a similarity between Zero and *Brahman* and says, "Zero the non-number, so to say, is the only true number from which all other numbers emerge". However, they feel the necessity of the qualified Brahman. For L.S.Ramamirtham it is "Ava": In order to understand and grasp that Absolute that has no form and to accept that truth, one needs support of a personal God and he says, "I cannot contain that invisible 'I' in my smallness. To face, to look at and to complain, to see frequently and to gather strength from, I need 'Her' (the picture of *"Peruntiru Amman")* blessings. And for Raja Rao it is Siva and Parvathy:

> I wanted to run out, run anywhere and find my God. Where was He, Was He in Kailash? God surely has no geography. Where then is He? and suddenly I saw myself, ochre rob and staff, stalking down my India, singing to Siva, Siva, Lord, Lord of Solitude, Lord of Truth, Lord of Ash. And Lord without name. Who then are you? And where?.

The belief in the notion that this Universe is the 'Lila' of God gets reflected in the utterances of the characters and narrators. In his *Priyacciltam,* (Atonment) Tarmarzjan says, One thing is clear. We think that we move the pawns. The reality that the pawn is moved by our own hand creates the illusion for us. But the hand that moves the pawn is moved by a power above us. Whether we call it God or whatever, it is not certainly, we who move the pawns.

And in another short story, *"Totu"* (The Ear Stud), the stranger says, "who are we to tell, what do we know? Everything is Hers. The way, the moment, the path, She beckons is Hers. Nothing is ours. Even the fact that we do not belong to ourselves would be realized by us only by Her mercy".

The same idea can be found in the narrator's comment in the first story of On *the Ganga Ghat* where he says, "Mother Parvati presides over it all". In *The Chess Master and* his *Moves,* Sivarama comes out with a similar observation: During those dramatic days in London (when we talked of the pigeons), there was such a sense that we were pawns in some metaphysical game, but J., my J. (if I can still call you so), who was playing it. Who indeed was *it*.

An elaboration of this thought expressing the feeling that God plays for his amusement can be seen elsewhere also. Thus the game, wherever you go, and whatever you do, till the Chessmaster, on the way to winning the game, but rubbing his head in sheer excitement, will say: 'Let us stop, now. It is four o'clock' But, Master, you are winning.' 'That is why, son, I stop. The game is for the game's sake,' 'How so?' 'You made the rule. You can also change it. Play the game now, as you go on inventing your rules. Go'.

In The Cat and Shakespeare, a similar idea is expressed in Ramakrishna Pai's speculation, "Destiny brings to us little slips of paper, as the office peon does from some visitor to the boss".

But though both of them are basically Advaitins, there are also Visishtadvaitic notions in them. Raja Rao in his The Cat and Shakespeare talks about absolute surrender and divine grace like a Visishtadvaitin. As Esha Dey puts it, "The cat indicates that the world is, the dream indicates that it is not". i.e., one finds both non dualism and modified dualism in The Cat and Shakespeare. Govindan Nair who believes in the protection and care of God does not believe that the world is real. He is puzzled by the illusive nature of life and keeps on thinking about it. "One can be and not be but be and where one is one cannot be seen".

Thus Raja Rao seeks to unveil the mysteries of life by being receptive to all the philosophies. He moves from one path to another desirous of learning further and reaching the ultimate truth. One can perceive this sway from one philosophy to another in L.S.Ramamirtham too. He believes in the existence of the theistic God and in surrendering himself unto him as in *Visishtadvaita*. In *Ava* there is *a* description of the goddess that reads like an invocation: "You are the omniscient, you are the truth. You are the beauty and you are the peace". And in Apita he talks about surrender: "God also wants only this... Surrender yourself unto me ... How light do I feel after having surrendered myself unto you".

Likewise there are also instances of *Tantric* elements in Raja Rao's novels. Dayal gives an account of *Tantric* philosophy and has analyzed the work of Raja Rao from this angle. He writes:

> *Tantra,* according to Swami Sivananda, explains the knowledge concerning *tatva* (truth or Brahman) and mantra (mystic syallbles). Through the *Yoga* enshrined in *Tantra* an individual self can realise the supreme by awakening the *'kundalini sakfi'* and taking it to *'sahasrar chakra'* at the crown of the head. The attainment of this goal is possible only by the practical spiritual discipline.

Tantric philosophy gives prime position to *Sakti* and sees Siva and *Sakti* as the two aspects of the Absolute; it deifies woman. The Goddess is invoked by names such as Lakshmi, Saraswathi, Mahakali, Durga and so on and the aspirant perceives the Divine Mother in every woman. *Tantric* philosophy advocates realization not by self abstinence as in *Vedanta* but through *Bhoga,* i.e., through sexuality. Exaltation and deification of woman, enjoying sexual pleasures which result in spiritual awakening, all these are found in *The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare,* and *The Chess Master and his Moves.* There are instances of extra-marital relationship in all these novels. In *The Cat and Shakespeare* Govindan Nair eulogises Shanta, her womanhood and womanhood as such.

The influence of *Saktam,* (considering *Sakti* as the supreme deity, and seeing the Absolute in the form of *Sakti]* can be seen in L. S. Ramamirtham also. In fact he attributes feminine form to the Absolute: She is the *idisakti* who created the world and made it function. She is present in every mother and in all the other aspects of women.

> She is the Truth. (you can think of her as He or She).
>
> Even He is She.

The illustrations given above reveal that L. S. Ramamirtham considers *Sakti* as the supreme power. He is a Tantric only to that extent and no more. Apart from the influence of the various Hindu philosophies on these writers there is also the influence of Hindu religious traditions and of the conflicts created by them. Both of them describe the *Apisekam* and the *Darshan* of the Goddess. They talk about the peace and strength, they receive from the *Darshan.* In *The Serpent and the Rope,* Rama describes the beauty of the deity in Annapurna temple: "How beautiful the Devi looked, in her saffron sari and with dark forehead bejewelled and what strength emanated from her. what depth of peacen. Likewise, L. S. Ramamirtham describes in *Aval* the *apisekas* one by one and he enjoys the smile that glows with mercy and victory.

As both of them see existence as continuous, and believe in the immortality of the soul, they do not give importance to rituals. In *The Serpent and the Rope* the grandfather tells Rama, "God is not hidden in a formula, nor is affection confined to funeral ceremonies". In the same way a frustrated mother tells the son, in L. S. Ramamirthamls short story "Twani" *(Sound)*:

> Enough of this hypocritical life. This hypocrisy need not continue through the ceremonies. My birth was not in my power. My life belonged to others. Let death at least be mine. Don't think I will wait for the ti1 and the water you will offer for me.

The two spirtual aspirants, however, differ in certain aspects. While Raja Rao does not give importance to conventional morality L. S. Ramamirtham attaches great importance to morality. Ramasamy in *The Serpent and the Rope* and Sivarama in *The Chess Master and his* Moves do not believe in morality in it. Sivarama tells Rani Sahiba, "YOU know, I have little respect for what people call morality; I love the true, that is all".

The central characters in L.S.Ramamirtham's novels – Tarmarzjan (Kal Cirikkiratu) Ampi (Kaluku) - are not flippant in their relationship with others and care for morality. The scholarship of Raja Rao-his knowledge of the various philosophies, history, myth etc., is revealed in his philosophical discussions. L. S. Ramamirtham, on the other hand, has not read as much as Raja Rao and hence cannot conduct out his philosophical discussions as effectively and successfully as Raja Rao. As mentioned earlier, Raja Rao's characters are intellectuals, Rama, Sivarama and even Govindan Nair to some extent, while on the other hand, L. S. Ramamirthamls characters are average individuals distinguished by their spiritual Raja Rao's fictions show his vast learning and his serious commitment to philosophy.

Raja Rao is himself a sadhaka, and is seriously committed to Advaita. L. S. Ramamirtham, on the other hand, is not fully devoted to philosophy. In spite of this difference, a fervent desire to understand the nature of the Absolute and unravel the mysteries of the Universe, marks the works of these two. Both of them deal with profound metaphysical questions and take the guidance of the Hindu philosophies and religious texts to try to answer them. They voice in their fiction, the longing of the soul for the Absolute and its struggle to find the right path that will lead to the Absolute. They are persistent in their attempt and continue the "never ending quest.

6

Looking at Different Prospectives

The publication of *The Serpent and the Rope* in 1960 brought world recognition for Raja Rao (a British Professor once mentioned publicly that the novel was even considered for the Nobel Prize) and ensured his place among the masters of Indo-Anglian fiction.

Although a contemporary of Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan and a product of the India of Gandhi and Nehru, Raja Rao is a class by himself in technique and vision. Hailing from Hassan in the Mysore State, he carries in his veins a strong scholarly and spiritual tradition. His work reveals the evolution of a master artist, and *The Serpent and the Rope* can justly be deemed his *magnum opus.*

An attempt is made here to deal with three of Raja Rao's works–*Kanthapura* (1938), a novel, *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947), a collection of short stories, and *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), a novel again. To take the short stories first, *The Cow of the Barricades* contains nine of them, composed during 1933-47. Only one of them, A *Client* is translated from the Kannada original, while three others first appeared in their French versions. Slight changes are said to have been made in all the stories for the collected edition. Many of them are sketches rather than stories, like the fine free strokes of an adept painter, and vivify to us scenes of contemporary India and the India that is changeless.

Javni, the first story, is the portrait of a female domestic servant, to whom love and loyalty are second nature. She is simple and pure, happy and uncomplaining, and instinctively offers love from an abundance. She is freshly employed in the household of Ramappa's sister, Ramappa is the narrator and is past forty and wrinkled, but remins a rapture in her eyes. Ramappa's brother-in-law is a Revenue Inspector and Javni has been serving only Revenue Inspectors all her life. She is sure that Ramappa too, whom she looks upon as a god, would one day become one, with his learning and beauty. She is good like a *cow* according to anybody in the town of Malkad, and almost a mother, as Ramappa's sister regards her. She is content to eat her food in the byre in dirt and darkness, and is not a little surprised to find Ramappa disturbed over her plight. She cannot have light because oil is expensive and what she earns is only a rupee a month. Ramappa feels the agony that she should have felt but does not feel. He says:

> I heard an owl hoot somewhere, and far, far away, somewhere too far and too distant for my rude ears to hear, the world wept its silent suffering plaints. Had not the Lord said: 'Whenever there is misery and ignorance, I come'? Oh, when will that day come, and when will the Conch of Knowledge blow?
>
> I had nothing to say. My heart beat fast. And closing my eyes, I sank into the primal flood, the moving fount of Being. Man, I love thee.
>
> Javni sat and ate. The mechanical mastication of the rice seemed to represent her life, her whole existence.

It is not Ramappa but Raja Rao pouring forth his helpless misery at the sad lot of the common people in the society, and the sense of misery grows into boundless love for all humanity, which alone can end the evil. There is also a faint yet unmistakable insinuation against the malady of the caste system. Javni narrates her woeful tale to Ramappa in composed acceptance–her marriage with the Maharaja's washerman, his tragic death, the constant protection of the 'Great Goddess Talakkamma', to whom she prays for Ramappa's prosperity also. After sometime, however, Ramappa's brother-in-law has to leave the place and Ramappa and his sister have to part from Javni. It is a tearful adieu on both the sides. Ramappa sums up Javni when he tells her:

'No, Javni. In Contact With a heart like yours who will not bloom into a god?'

Javni is indeed a typical character of the Indian village. What is it that makes the poor people happy and fills them with endless reserves of patience and love? Is it their faith, which we call superstition? Is faith a way of escape or a means of happiness? One faces these questions in *Javni* and Raja Rao, also suggests the truth that God has his abode in pure and innocent hearts that know not to demand but to offer.

Akkayya is a moving story of the pathetic life of an old widow, who is also, like Javni, a part of most Indian homes. She is service personified. She cooks for the family, discusses *Vedanta* with the elders and brings up the children. But, alas, her service is un-recognised and she dies like an unhonoured soldier. In fact, the story is perhaps her only funeral ceremony. *Narsiga* is a powerful account of a pure and simple shepherd boy, who gives his own version of the Gandhian revolution and its impact on the rural world. *In Khandesh* is a vivid picture of the village Khandesh, whose elders are loyal and faithful to the Crown and know nothing of the 'city news' riots and protests, arrests and shootings that the younger generation indulged in.

They are elaborately exhorted and authoritatively herded by the Patel, the local symbol of the Crown for them, to line up near the railway track to have a glimpse, although imaginary, of the Maharaja, who would pass along the route accompanied by the 'Representative and Relation of Most High Majesty across the sea'. When they gather at last, there is a terrific storm, and a heavy downpour imprisons them, as it were. Sheets of rain like walls of curtain tear them and the trees before them look like policemen. The story depicts the transition between the era of unquestioning loyalty to the British and the beginning of organised opposition to the alien rule, and the picturesque concluding passage describing the climax has a double suggestiveness the havoc of the British rule and also the beginning of the end of loyalty to it are alike suggested in terms of nature's fury. The pattern of broken and unconnected lines adds a visual dimension to the description of the confusion of the storm.

The title-story, *The Cow of the Barricades*, is a poetic recordation of the Gandhian phenomenon, with Gauri the cow-mother as the central character. The Mahatma preaches the message of non-violence and the Master transmits it to the people, because he is their President. But the workmen maintain: "It is not with 'I love you, I love you' that you can change the grinding heart of this Government." The people know that the Master is right and that the workmen too are right in their own way, and await the outbreak of violence with anguished hearts. Gauri, the cow, is the divine ambassador of peace. The workmen who find her proceeding towards the barricades want to shoot her but soon throw down their arms and salute her. Even the red man's army, which after all consists of Indians, is transformed by her, because she appeared to them like a drop of the Ganges. They too join the crowd.

The red chief is angered by this and shoots down Gauri: "But their chief, the red man, saw this and fired a shot. It went through Gauri's head, and she fell a vehicle of God among lowly men." Gauri is Soon deified and the Master Says: "Gauri is waiting in the Middle Heavens to be born. She will be reborn when India sorrows again before she is free" All creatures –the mute and the speechful–are alike capable of the fullness of love, and perhaps the mute can sometimes inspire and even elevate the speechful. The story thus combines myth and politics, which is often the case in India, and while in some of the other stories there are cow-like women, full of love and sacrifice, the cow is the central character of this story and, as a symbol of peace and love, strikes a contrast with the petty men who try to destroy one another, unmindful of their basic oneness as the children of God.

What is obvious in contemporary India–the impact of the red man's rule and the transformation of the nation ushered in by Gandhi and what is deeper down her racial character, social peculiarities and mythical and mythological moorings both seem to be effectively portrayed in these short stories. Though structurally they seem to be rather loosely knit, they are written in a style which has a piercing directness and poetic richness. Another important aspect of the stories is that they are the matrix out of which the themes, images and symbols of the later works are Woven. The cow image has already been referred to and this figures in some form or the other in all the works. Javni, Akkayya, Lakshmamma in *The Serpent and the Rope*–all seem to be of one mould and have something of the 'Cow' in them, while Ramappa, Moorthy and Ramaswamy appear to be portraits of the ideal man, though the character of Ramaswamy is the evidence of finished art and total vision. Likewise, *In Khandesh, Narsiga* and *The Cow of the Barricades* contain the seeds of *Kanthapura.*

Raja Rao's first novel, *Kanthapura,* describes the whole gamut of the Gandhian revolution in a microscopic way. Kanthapura, a south Indian village, is the scene of action and the narrator is an elderly woman of the Village. She is herself a participant in the action and one sees things as she saw them. The novel is a mixture of fact and fiction, myth and history, as is seen in the short stories also. Raja Rao had already tried to impart something of the Indian idiom to the English prose style, and in *Kanthapura* he writes a foreword to justify the choice of his rather peculiar idiom which includes the rhythm and the raciness, the vigour and the spontaneity of the vernacular speech. He says:

> "The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up–like Sanskrit or Persian was before–but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it."

Raja Rao has probably provided in these lines a justification for all Indo-Anglian writing. If there can be American English or Australian English, why not Indian English, which will of course be basically related to the central 'English' English? Indian English, however, is not bad or 'Baboo' English. As regards the problem of style, Raja Rao says:

> "The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs. We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move, we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on. And our paths are paths interminable ...We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous 'ats' and 'ons' to bother us –we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story."

The effect of the rather peculiar colloquial style is that the book reads more like a rhythmically recited ballad than like a mere novel.

Gandhi and Gandhism had their impact on almost every aspect of our national life, economics and education, politics and religion and even literature richly absorbed the influence. Several Indo-Anglian writers essayed to project the tremors and stirrings of the Gandhian India in their works. Gandhian politics and economics respectively form the themes of K. S. Venkataramani's *Kandan the Patriot* and *Murugan the Tailter.* In *Wailing for the Mahatma* R. K. Narayan projects Gandhi himself and adds a new strength to the plot, even like Mulk Raj Anand in *Untouchable* and *The Sword and the Sickle.*

It is said that Gandhi made heroes out of clay, and, like the ubiquitous Krishna, proliferated himself in a way. Every village had its own local *avatar* of Gandhi, like Moorthy in *Kanthapura,* and its own share of the Gandhian revolution. In *Kanthapura* the political struggle with the British is often raised to the mythological level–as in the short story *Narsiga*– and the red men's rule is regarded as the rule of the *asuras.* The Satyagrahis are the *devas,* who for the nonce suffer discomfiture but will ultimately emerge victorious. There are other interesting polarisations: Superstitious orthodoxy and progressivist reform, exploitation by the master and the helplessness of the coolie, the corruption of the official and the misery of the villager. All these minor conflicts and the major confrontation between the British bureaucracy and the Gandhian Satyagrahis unconsciously and interestingly mingle and jumble, and the book mirrors the India of the 1930 in all its confusion and intensity.

Gandhi preached the gospel of non-violent non-co-operation, and there was response like an upsurge. Every village and every town and every city had its Congress Committee and everywhere there was the stir of awakening life, the acceptance of a challenge, the preparation for a struggle. The Salt and Forest Laws were broken and toddy shops picketed. Social barriers like untouchability were sought to be removed and a common purpose united the people. All these phases we see in *Kanthapura.*

Kanthapura is calm enough to begin with like any other village, with its usual activities and innocent pleasures. The people too are seen performing their normal functions, listening to *harikathas,* etc. Then suddenly the city invades the village and the Congress work is started by Moorthappa, 'the learned one', because one day he had a vision wherein he heard a message within himself–the prompting of an 'inner voice'–after a face-to-face experience of the Mahatma: "There is but one force in life and that is Truth, and there is but one love in life and that is the love of mankind, and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all." He falls at the feet of the Mahatma calling himself his slave:

> "What can I do for you, my son?" and Moorthy said, like Hanuman to Rama, "Any command," and the Mahatma said, "I give no commands save to seek Truth," and Moorthy said, "I am ignorant, how can I seek Truth?", and the people around him were trying to hush him and to take him away, but the Mahatma said, "You wear foreign cloth, my son." "It will go, Mahatmaji." "You can help your country by going and working among the dumb millions of the villages." "So be it, Mahatmaji."

From that very moment Moorthy rises a different man, and, like Ekalavya, shapes himself as a disciple of Gandhi. He gives up foreign cloth and foreign education, and returns to his village. His mother Narsamma finds all her hopes shattered. Bhatta, the custodian of orthodox religion, dislikes Moorthy's attempts to rehabilitate the Harijans and, with the help of the Swami, the religious head, secures his excommunication. Narsamma is unable to bear the shock and dies. From that time onwards Moorthy lives in Rangamma's house. He perseveres in his charkha and untouchability campaigns. Rangamrna also is no village simpleton. She gets quite a few newspapers from the city and acquires general education. The villagers hear her with wonder and fear when she describes the curious things that she reads about:

> And she told us, too, how in the far-off countries there were air vehicles that move, that veritably move in the air, and how men sit in them and go from town to town; and she spoke to us, too, of the speech that goes across the air; and she told us, mind you, she assured us you could sit here and listen to what they are saying in every house in London and Bombay and Burma.

She also tells them a great deal about the wonder of the country of the 'hammer and sickle and electricity'. Pariah Ramakka, one of the listeners asks innocently, "So in that country pariahs and brahmins are the same, and there are no people to give paddy to be husked and no people to do it– strange country, mother." Equally innocent is Rangamma's reply, "My paper says nothing about that." Rangamma is the leader of the women Satyagrahis.

During one of his visits to the workers in the Skeffington Coffee Estate there is an encounter between Moorthy and Bade Khan, the policeman, who symbolises the British authority. It is night time and Moorthy is asked by Bade Khan not to enter the estate. Moorthy tries to force his way and Bade Khan hits him on his head with the lathi. Immediately the workers–Rachanna Madanna and others–rush forward, fall on Bade Khan and hit him back. The women tear his hair. Moorthy cries out for peace. The next day he announces a three-day fast because violence has been committed. He sits near the central pillar of the *mandap* and goes on meditating. Neither Rangamma with her pleadings that he should give up the fast nor waterfall Venkamma with her threat of a welcome with the broomstick at the end of the 'counting of beads' really disturbs Moorthy and he goes on to burn the dross of the flesh and purify the body. A new divine strength descends into him and love, unqualified and universal, gushes forth from his heart.

I shall love even my enemies. The Mahatma says "We should love even our enemies", and closing his eyes tighter, he slips back into the foldless sheath of the Soul, and sends out rays of love to the east, rays of love to the west, rays of love to the north, rays of love to the south, and love to the earth below and the sky above.

When love thus fills him, he feels a new exaltation coming to his limbs and his whole being beats out a rhythm, a song of Kabir:

> The road to the City of Love is hard, brother,
>
> It shard,
>
> Take care, take care, as you walk along it.

When he opens his tearful eyes, he sees a blue radiance filling the whole earth and dazzled, he rises and prostrates before the god, chanting Sankara's "*Sivoham, Sivoham.* I am siva. I am Siva. Siva am I." On the night of the third day of the fast, there is a bhajan and people gather from the Potters' Street and the Brahmins' street, the Weavers' street and the Pariah street, for the love of Moorthy has already communicated itself to the village. Even Bade Khan is there to join them. Misery needs the healing touch of compassion, and hatred is exceeded by love. At the end of the fast Moorthy emerges a different man, the man of peace and love and the instrument of Gandhi. He walks out to preach the 'Don't-touch-the-Government campaign.'

Very soon, with the help of Range Gowda, the man of action, Moorthy starts the Congress group in Kanthapura, affiliated to the Congress of All India, and 'one cannot become a member of the Congress if one will not promise to practise *Ahimsa,* and to speak Truth and to spin at least two thousand yards of yarn per year.' There is a god's procession and a bhajan after which the Committee is elected. Moorthy and Range Gowda and Rangamma and Rachanna and Seenu constitute the Congress Panchayat Committee of Kanthapura. Twenty-three members are listed after two days and an amount of five rupees and twelve annas is sent to the Provincial Congress Committee. Soon afterwards the police come and arrest seventeen men of Kanthapura. All except Moorthy are finally let off.

We wept and we prayed, and we vowed and we fasted, and may be the gods would hear our feeble voices. Who would hear us, if not they?

Many advocates offer to defend Moortby. The students formed a Defence Committee and collected copper and silver. But Moorthy says, "That is not for me. Between Truth and me none shall come." For, Gandhism implies implicit and unswerving faith in Truth. Advocate Ranganna and even Sadhu Narayan fail in trying to make him accept defence. At last the Sadhu leaves, giving Moorthy his blessings. A public meeting is organised at which the work of Gandhi and his followers is praised and orthodox religion with its threats of ex-communication is condemned. There is a big procession which cries aloud, *Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai.*

The people of Kanthapura see the news in the papers next day and feel relieved and happy that 'there is still many a good heart in this world, else the sun would not rise as he does nor the Himavathy flow by the Kanchamma Hill'. The red man's judges give three months' rigorous imprisonment to Moorthy. On hearing the news all the Satyagrahis undertake a token fast.

Moorthy returns from prison after the passage of three months. It is on the eve of the launching of the Dandi Salt March by the Mahatma. The people of Kanthapura get ready for the event under Moorthy's leadership. They think of the Mahatma not as a man or a god but as a Big Mountain–blue and high and wide and catching the light of the setting sun like the Sahyadri mountains. Moorthy is of course the Small Mountain. The Salt March, however, is a little delayed, and presently one sees the picketing of Boranna's toddy grove. The melee of the advancing crowds and the furious red man's police is indeed dramatised by Raja Rao:

> Then Moorthy says, "Squat down before the toddy booth", and we rush and we stumble, and we rise and we duck, and we all go squatting before the toddy booth, and the coolies are marching behind us and the policemen tighten round the booth, and then quick and strong, the rain patters on the leaves and the thatch and the earth. May be that's the blessing of the gods!

The rain reminds one of the downpour in *In Khandesh*. Soon the idea of picketing catches like wild fire and it is done here, there, everywhere.

Events move on to the no-tax campaign and the orgy of violence unleashed by it. The flood of fury takes its toll. After prolonged peregrination some of the people eventually settle down in Kashipura. Moorthy is set free. He writes to his companion, Ratna, things must change. The youths here say they will change it. Jawaharlal will change it. You know Jawaharlal is like a Bharata to the Mahatma, and he, too, is for non-violence and he, too, is a Satyagrahi, but he says in Swaraj there shall be neither the rich nor the poor. And he calls himself an 'equal-distributionist', and I am with him and his men.

The Round Table Conference, which held out the promise of freedom, is described thus in mythological terms:

> They say the Mahatma will go to the red man's country and he will get us Swaraj. He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall all be happy. And Rama will come back from exile, and Sita will

> be with him, for Ravana will be slain and Sita freed, and he will come back with Sita on his right in a chariot in the air, and brother Bharata will go to meet them with the worshipped sandal of the Master on his head. And as they enter Ayodhya there will be a rain of flowers.

Range Gowda is the only one of the fighters to return to Kanthapura and the narrator herself takes leave of the village after praying to Mother Kenchamma and Father Siva. This brings the story to a close.

There are passages in the novel which are showers of lyrical poetry. Words tumble as in a quick succession and a picture of pulsating life is created. The coming of rains in Vaisakha, for example, is described thus:

> The rains have come, the fine, first-footing rains that skip over the bronze mountains, tiptoe the crags, and leaping into the valleys, go splashing and wind-swung, a winnowed pour, and the coconuts and the betel-nuts and the cardamom plants choke with it and hiss back. And there, there it comes over the Bebbur Hill and the Kanthur Hill and begins to paw upon the tiles, and the cattle come running home, their ears stretched back, and the drover lurches behind some bel-tree or pipal-tree, and people leave their querns and rush to the courtyard, and turning towards Kenchamma temple, send forth a prayer, saying "There, there, the rains have come, Kenchamma; may our house be white as silver," and the lightning flashes and the thunder stirs the tiles, and children rush to the gutter-slabs to sail paper boats down to Kashi.

One almost *feels* the rain and is drenched by the poetic prose. A slice of reality is forcefully presented and all the details are seen as in a slow motion film.

The novel portrays in this way the whole drama of the Gandhian revolution as enacted in a village in all its frenzy and fury. It might have been any village and the narrator could simply have been anybody's grandmother. The typical features of rural life–its mixture of politics and mythology, its seraphic freedom from the taint of science and technology, its ruggedness and even its vulgarity–are faithfully reproduced in terms of art. Even the language is creatively moulded by Raja Rao to distil the raciness and the rhythm of the vernacular into English, and the poetic non-stop narration creates at once a sense of dramatic immediacy and personal intimacy. The novel is, in short, a unique fictional experiment in Gandhian politics.

After *Kanthapura* in 1938, the collection of short stories, *The Cow of the Barricades*, came out in 1947, but after that there was a spell of silence for nearly thirteen years. *The Serpent and the Rope* come out in 1960 and justified the long incubation. The novel is at once intriguing with its wide canvas and multiple vision of France, England and India. The response was rather one of mingled feelings, and an American reviewer, Charles W. Mann, says that "the reader must face a flood of learned allusion and often annoying garrulity in this complex, yet poetic work." He further accuses Raja Rao of producing one of the most 'difficult and circuitous' novels of recent years, although he recommends it for all libraries concerned with serious modern fiction! The reviewer finally says that the try of Raja Rao is worthy of respect and much more subtle than can adequately be expressed in a review, and one would agree with Mr. Mann's conclusion. The reviewer of the TLS, however, calls it another 'leisurely novel' and sums up the plot as a series of 'difficulties attendant upon a marriage between a young Indian, Rama, and a French intellectual, Madeline.

Naturally considerable adjustment of values and ideals must take place if such a union is to be satisfactory. Professor K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar says in his book that it is perhaps the most impressive novel yet written by an Indian in English. It might even be said that it is the most *inclusive* novel to be written in English by an Indian. One might turn to it for the ineluctable 'Englishing' of the Sanskrit verse, or one might witness in it endless debates of teasing philosophical systems, or one might gather from it pithy pronouncements and intriguing epigrams. The total comprehension of the book certainly calls for a variety of insights and hence the despair of the critic. The complexity in structure is the obvious result of Raja Rao's unique personality–his rich and versatile scholarship and the highly metaphysical bent of his mind, which is amazingly mercurial in its movement. He cannot for this reason, conform to any formal ceiling, and this is true of all his work.

The plot is concerned with the life of a South Indian youth by name K. R. Ramaswamy. He goes to France to work on a thesis connected with the Cathar heresy. He is a *Smartha* and his lineage goes back to Vidyaranya and even the Upanishadic Yajnavalkya. He had been initiated into the Upanishads at the age of four and is a master of his mother-tongue and Sanskrit. He quotes from French and Italian too with facility. He is firmly rooted in the Indian Vedantic tradition, but is at once at home in France or England and achieves communion with its living spirit. He is wise in himself and is the cause of wisdom in others, like the Ganges whose waters purify and whose purity does not diminish. He is the modern embodiment of Tristan, Krishna and Satyavan.

It is at the University of Caen that Ramaswamy or Rama comes in contact with Madeline and they marry On 10th February 1949. A child is born who is called Krishna and later Pierre, but the child dies of broncho-pneumonia within a year of Its birth. Hearing of his father's illness, Rama returns to India in 1951. This is the starting point of the story and the happenings till 1954 are included in the novel. Retrospective narration, jottings from diary, descriptions and dialogues, and sheer poetic thapsodies sometimes–all these fill the wide scope of the book and make it difficult to read, though perhaps doubly rewarding.

The action of the novel is the physical basis for the spiritual evolution of Rama. Apparently Rama travels widely in India, France and England. He visits India in 1951 for his fathter's obsequies, in 1952 for his sister Saroja's marriage, and at the end of 1954, he proposes to return to India and spend his life in Travancore to seek his fulfilment in solitude. Having seen and experienced enough of the world and men at the physical and intellectual levels, he now qualifies for the quest and fulfilment of the spirit. In fact, this urge flows as an undercurrent throughout, because whatever the experience he is able to detach himself from its involvement, and even sensuality is but a necessary passage to the higher realms. Through a long process, he hues his way through the winding paths of Becoming to the goal of Being.

Madeline, his wife, is vividly created and her life too passes through the most breath-taking vicissitudes. From French Catholicism she drifts to Hinduism and from Hinduism finds her way to Buddhism. The process is however convincing and natural. The two children she bears do not survive and she realises that her life would acquire a meaning and a fullness only if she rises from limited love to unlimited love. Thus she naturally takes to Buddhism after Georges has initiated her into it. Through a process of struggle and hardship, she ascends to the highest spiritual levels and reduces the body to nothingness–a mere assemblage of the eighteen aggregates.

Savitri too–the Cambridge returned Raiput princess–discovers the full meaning of her life through Rama's association. There is mutual attraction between them, and while Rama sees himself in Savitri, Savitri feels he is her Satyavan. He is Tristan and she is Iseult, he Krishna and she Radha. Even the toe-rings given by Little Mother, Rama's second step-mother, seem to fit her. They also marry, in a symbolic way, in England, but soon she returns to India to marry the bridegroom of her parents' choice–Pratap, a jagirdar. Both Rama and Savitri realise ultimately that their 'marriage' is only spiritual and should never be corrupted by physical desire. He reveals to her the true nature of love–rejoicing in the rejoicing of the other. He accepts her as his principle, his Queen. Savitri achieves her happiness in life as a true wife.

Rama also plays the peace-giver to Saroja, his step sister and to Little Mother herself. He is the wise Vedantin who is always ready with a treat of wisdom to Georges and Lezo. Even Catherine, the cousin of Madeline and the daughter of uncle Charles, is helped by him to secure her happiness. She even has a feeling that she must have been his wife in the previous birth.

In this way almost all the characters in the truly cosmopolitan gathering share the influence of Rama and work out their realisation of peace and happiness. He himself finds that he is unable to bridge a gap, fill a void. The physical operation of thoracoplasty makes him lighter and takes away his disease and sorrow, and the climatic stage of his evolution starts. As Rama says once to Madeline:

> The world is either unreal or real–the serpent or the rope. There is no in-between-the-two and all that's in-between is poetry, is sainthood...And looking at the rope from the serpent is to see paradise, saints, avataras, gods, heroes, universes. For wherever you go, you see only with the serpent's eyes. Whether you call it duality or modified duality you invent a belvedere to heaven, you look at the rope from the posture of the serpent, you feel you are the serpent, you are, the rope is. But in true fact, with whatever eyes you see there is no serpent, there never was a serpent. You gave your own eyes to the falling evening and cried, 'Ayyo!' 'Oh! It's the serpent! You run and roll and lament, and have

> compassion for fear of pain, others' and your own. You see the serpent and in fear you feel you are it, the serpent, the saint. One–The Guru–brings you the lantern; the road is seen, the long, white road, going with the statutory stars. 'It is only the rope'. He shows it to you. And you touch your eyes and *know* there never was a serpent...

Here perhaps is a clue to the crucial philosophical problem of the novel. The *Rajju* is mistaken for the *Sarpa,* and the confusion brings about a chain reaction, which only strengthens the initial confusion or illusion and imparts to it the look of reality. All action in terms of duality and relativity seems to be within the purview of the operation of this illusion. But the illusion is itself the inevitable process of reaching the Reality. The forbidden apple has to be eaten and the consequences exceeded. The many have to coalesce into the One and the multiple vision has ultimately to transform into the integral vision.

Rama's quest is thus over and he knows his destiny. As he says, "Man is born in pain. His rebirth is solitude, his song is himself." The key lies in looking within or *antardrishti.* It is then that Rama says, even like Moorthy in *Kanthapura,* "Siva am I."

There are, of course, more things in the book. The concept *Rajju Sarpa Bhranti* or Illusion and Reality needs a scaffolding, even as the spirit needs the sheath of the mind and the mind itself the frame of the body. There are beautiful descriptions of nature and penetrating probes into human nature. The fun and frolic of a Hindu marriage, the pomp and ravelry of an English coronation, the campus of Cambridge and the life of Paris–all these and many more perceptions on a global scale are granted flesh and blood in memorable prose. There are philosophical conundrums which can exhaust the most tireless mind and expositions of serious thought which are a source of sweetness and light. One has the feeling, finally, that the novel is perhaps an inverted autobiography of Raja Rao and that Ramaswamy is a projection of the author himself in a large measure.

While *Kanthapura* is a novel of action, *The Serpent and the Rope* is essentially one of recollection. Both are authentic testaments of Indian life, but, while the one tries to capture the exciting drama on the surface, the other is concerned with the deeper varities comprehended in an epic sweep. While the one, in fine, is an experiment in language, the other is the language of the experiment that is life.

NATIONALISM

Rao's involvement in the nationalist movement is reflected in his first two books. The novel Kanthapura was an account of the impact of Gandhi's teaching on non-violent resistance against the British. The story is seen from the perspective of a small village in Karnataka. Rao borrows the style and structure from Indian vernacular tales and folk-epic. The narrator is an old woman. She tells how the community obtains from daily life, with its millennia-old worship of the local deity, the strength to stand against the British Raj. In the character of the young Moorthy, who comes back from the city, Rao portrays an idealist and supporter of ahimsa and satyagraha, who wants to cross the traditional barriers of caste. The work was highly praised by the English writer E. M.. Forster whose masterwork A Passage to India (1924) criticized British imperialism.

There is this apocryphal story of a meeting between Forster and Rao. In the latter half of 1945, Forster came to India for the third and last time. Raja was also in Bombay. Forster asked a common friend, Where is Raja Rao ... Where is he hiding? Raja recalls in an essay: The same evening I wrote a letter to Forster ... I have abandoned literature for good — and gone over to metaphysics; I am not a writer any more, I do not know on what grounds I could come to see you.

Forster immediately sent me a reply: 'You have, you say, abandoned literature for metaphysical inquiry. I have abandoned literature for nothing at all. So please let us meet.'

Rao has confessed: "I am no scholar. I am a creative writer. I love to play with ideas. It is like a chess game with horses, elephants, chamberlains and kings which might fight with one another. The game is not for winning. It is for rasa-delight."

Critics have noted that Rao's characters are invariably in search of self on various levels. More often than not they must contend with change arising from the pressure of events or the challenge of understanding the ethos of another culture. Rao's themes include the metaphysical apprehension of God, the nature of death, immortality, illusion and reality, duality and nonduality, good and evil, existence and destiny, Karma and Dharma; the quest for self-knowledge, the place of the guru, the influence of religion and social concepts and patterns and prejudices on individual and group behavior; the ideal and meaning of love and marriage, the impact of tradition on the individual and collective life and the meaning of India's real and symbolic content, and the historical or contemporary meeting of East and West in religious, political, and psychological terms. The list is by no means exhaustive. Neither does it suggest the way themes conflate, complement, or construct oppositions depicted through the increasing psychological authority of the characters from the early short stories, through Kanthapura, The Serpent and the Rope, and the Cat and Shakespeare, to the firm, monumental authority of The Chessmaster and His Moves.

This listing belies Rao's achievement of bringing into the life of each character and his or her relationships the extraordinarily complex worlds they each occupy, Indian, French, Greek, Hebraic, African, Chinese and which overlap and contain, in a single moment, the mundane and the metaphysical. That is a major achievement, as is Rao's remarkably successful reorientation of a language and his assembling of a narrative mode to articulate life against the larger movements of personality, situation, and environment.

INDIA IS MY HOME

Today, if you happen to visit the Perry Castaneda Library at the University of Texas, you will discover a special collection of works by and about the Indo-American writer/ philosopher which take up two shelves. And Rao, whose third wife Susan was a University of Texas student in the '70s, has claimed in an interview that though he lives in Austin he has in fact never left India. India is my home; there is no question.

In fact India is everywhere. Look at my house, he said, glancing at an Indian picture. Look inside my books in my room. It's all very Indian. And when asked by an interviewer if he writes to translate India for the West, as some critics have suggested, Rao replies: No. I just do it for myself. I make no concession to the West. Right, Susan? And his wife of 12 years laughs. Oh, absolutely. In no way, at any time.

In that 1997 interview with Anne Morris of the Austin American-Statesman, Rao acknowledged that he had found answers to his philosophical searching through meditation and long study with his guru, Sri Atmananda, in Trivandrum, India. He confessed that he often saw the West in a state of great gestation. The West has not reached its destiny, he said.

But he recalled that, In the '60s and '70s the search for values was very remarkable. I was really thinking America would be the greatest nation ... but the pragmatic American, I think, has not got time for India.About Chessmaster's MovesRaja Rao's The Chessmaster and His Moves first appeared in the year 1988 and in the same year it was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature. The book under review is a reprint and it informs us that RR at the ripe age of 90-plus is revising the next two volumes of *The Chessmaster* *trilogy*. This book itself contains three books spread over 700 odd pages. Raja Rao started on his literary journey in the 1930s at the age of 28. Over the years he has produced quality work, though his output or oeuvre can by no means be called prolific. The first novel *Kanthapura* was published in 1938 a realistic account of the Gandhian freedom struggle in the 30s and its impact on the masses of India. The second, *The Serpent and the Rope* came out in 1960, a philosophical novel abut the confrontation of cultures of the East and the West. Raja Rao got the Sahitya Akademi Award on this novel. In between, two short novels and then came *The Chessmaster* in 1988 and the last major work — *The Great Indian Way* — A *Life of Mahatma Gandhi* in 1998. He has also published a number of short stories and essays titled Meaning of India (1996). After living in France for a number of years, Raja Rao moved to the US where he taught at the University of Ausin, Texas.

The old trinity of Indian English writers of fiction — Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand have dominated the Indian English scene for over 50 years now. They represent three different facets of India through their writings. Raja Rao constantly discusses the nationalist struggle and its revolutionary implications in terms of Hindu mythology, religion, culture and its metaphysics. The meditative quality in Raja Rao's writings unfolds itself in his deeper concerns for man's spiritual existence on earth and sets his characters on a metaphysical quest for the Absolute.

From *The Serpent and the Rope*, through *The Cat and Shakespeare* and to *The Chessmaster*, which is also about man's pilgrimage to seek deliverance from the self (into the Self), Raja Rao's quest for the metaphysical continues. Put together, these three novels embody the qunitessence of Raja Rao's genius and philosophy of life. In the novel under review, the author reveals his deep interest in Indian metaphysics. His earnest desire to know the reality discloses that he has an ontological awareness. 'I have abandoned literature for good and gone over the metaphysics' is a remark which is often touted for his interest in quest for truth. In all his novels, Raja Rao has captured the cadences of the subcontinent. In this novel he ventures beyond and has included Europeans, Africans and Jewish characters besides the Indians, in his cast of characters, confined to just nine main characters.

For once, he explores a seemingly tragic love affair between an Indian mathematician, Sicarama Sastri living in Paris and a married woman, a Rajput princess Jayalaksmi married to Raja Surender Singh. Such relationships bring sorrow and despair in its train and the next best course is to turn inwards to search for answers and meanings. This very search transforms the book into metaphysical exploration.

The novel depicts Siva's quest for truth as well as his interest in Buddhist, *vedantic, tantric* ontologies. In this dramatic presentation Siva is haunted by the echoes of love and the anecdotal approach reveals the flashback technique, much popular in the times when Raja Rao set out to set this love-tale in the 60 of the twentieth century, the Nehru-De Gaulle era, published it in 1988 and reviewed again as a reprint in 2002. A span of 40 years have elapsed in-between and so many mind-boggling things have happened in the world. Sastri's love for the French actress Suzanne or her compatriot Mireille serves to underline the differences of approach between East and West. They seek happiness in the world itself while Sastri looks for freedom from the world itself. The novel portrays the frustration and non-fulfilment of love between Siva and Jaya and also ontological deliberations on love, God, time, truth, death and a host of other things. The symbolic meaning of the title, to my mind, is that for Raja Rao, the Chessmaster is an emblem of the creator, Brahma and the game of Chess (with its Indian origins) is presented for the work in the world and the Moves stand for Divine play. Whatever we may call it, Sivarama who speaks and describes himself and others, of course, from his experience and his angle is the Chessmaster and his Moves, for the narrative implies his growth.

Unless you grow you cannot give. And growth needs search. And search fearlessness. And all search is inward the outer leads one to repetition.

Jaya, Suzanne and Mireille, the three women who cross Siva's path contribute powerfully and comprehensively to his growth, emotional, intellectual, his metaphysics and his perception and understanding of others. That growth deepens into one vital direction through his friendship with Michael, taking him into areas beyond the personal, the sensual, the mathematical and towards the true universality of the Absolute. The dialogue with Michael, the Rabbi, revolves around certain major themes invoked by Raja Rao's terms, dual, non-dual, dissolution, zero, truth, God and introduces the most important theme in *The Chessmaster.*

"Michel, the real dialogue in the the world is not between the East and the West, but between you and me, between the brahmin and the rabbi." Michel closed his eyes... and slowly opening them again, remarked you are probably right."

This dialogue is an exploration of reasons for *The Holocaust* (the killing of millions of Jews by the Nazis in 1930 s and 1940s) and an attempt to expiate it. Raja Rao's scholarship, range and reach, his knowledge of French and Sanskrit, his compendium knowledge of Indian legends, myth, history, religion from a native living abroad for the past many decades is inexplicable. One thing I can say with authority that this novel is not for those who are mediocre in their intellectual ability and totally lacking in enthusiasm and idealism about things Indian. Every re-reading of the novel reveals a few hidden truths, new beauties, new insights and presents the world to all in a new light. The Chessmaster, presents a vision of Indian civilisation from its radiant origins in mythology to Gandhi-Nehru's new India of the 60s and thereafter.

It is not for nothing that The Chessmaster have earned paeans of praise from the literati all over the world. All fiction of RR takes you back to the India of yore and keeps you engaged for quite a larger while and you are forced to remember India that was Bharat not very long ago.

Raja Rao: Sacred Wordsmith

Arguably, Raja Rao is the most brilliant master of Indo-Anglian writing. Inarguably, he is the only true philosopher-novelist of Indian English. Although settled in France, Rao, born in 1908 in Karnataka, never ceased to be an Indian in sensibility. His desire for spirituality made him visit India frequently and led to his meeting various masters, notably Ramana Maharshi, Mahatma Gandhi and Atmananda Guru.

The spirit of this quest permeates all his works. All of Rao's protagonists struggle with the same concerns—What is Truth? How can one find it? The means may be as diverse as the Jnana Yoga of the intellectual Rama in *The Serpent and the Rope* or the Karma Yoga of the Gandhian Moorthy in *Kanthapura*. Even his short fiction and nonfiction is imbued with this spirit of inquiry. Savor the deeply philosophical and spiritual essence of Rao's works in the following extract from *The Serpent and the Rope*, and a short story called *Companions.* Both have been excerpted from the anthology *The Best of Raja Rao*, a Katha publication.

THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE

At Barbirolli's I ordered a Chianti, and said, as though it had some meaning: "And now you must learn Italian. Io ritornai dalla santissima onda/rifatto si come piante novelle/ renovellate di novella fronda/Puro e disposto a salire alle stelle," I recited. "You must learn Italian, for God has texture in that language. God is rich and Tuscan, and the Arno has a bridge made for marriage processions."

> "So has Allahabad," Savithri added, somewhat sadly. "And appropriately it is called the Hunter Bridge."

"May I go on with my Superman?" I begged.

"The biological sense of warmth having come back to me and how nice this Chianti is"—she raised her glass—" I can now follow any intricacy of thought. I like to play chess with you in history."

"The Minister is the Superman," I started.

"And the King?"

"The Sage. The Vedantin, himself beyond duality, is in himself, through duality and nonduality."

"That's too difficult with Chianti. I wish, Rama-shall I call you that from now? I wish you could sing me a song, and I would lie on your lap, far away where there is no land or road, no river or people, no father, fiancée, filigree, palace or elephants-perhaps just a mother-and on some mountain..."

"In *Kailasa*..." I said.

"You would sit in meditation."

"And you?"

"Pray, that you might awaken and not burn the world with that third eye—that eye which plays with history," she laughed.

"And parrots would sing, and the mango leaf be tender, be like copper with morning sunshine."

"And I would go round you three times, once, twice, thrice, and fall at your ash-coloured feet, begging that the Lord might absorb me unto himself... I am a woman," she added hesitantly, "a Hindu woman. *Meretho Giridhara Gopala*...

Mine the mountain-bearing Krishna, My lord none else than He."

History, Stalin and the Superman had vanished. Trying to solve the puzzle of history, like some hero in a fable, I had won a bride. A princess had come out of the budumekaye, but the moment I had entered the world of the seven sisters the Prime Minister's son had led a revolution in the palace, had imprisoned the other six, and put us two under arrest. King Mark of Tintagel awaited his Iseult.

I would have to give her to him, but having drunk the potion of Granval, I would meet her by brooks and forests; I would be torn by dragons, but someday we would lie in the forest, the sword between us. Some day love would be strong enough to shatter the rock to fragments, and we should be free to wander where we would, build an empire if we cared.

> "And we shall have a bambino," she said, and laughed as though she had caught my thought.
>
> "Two," I added. "One is Ganesha and the other Kumara."
>
> "And we shall throw colors on each other at Holi under the mountain moon. Our Indian Eros shoots with a flower, so why burn him?"
>
> "Why not?" I asked. "The third eye opens when the attraction has ended. I hope you are not attracted by me?"
>
> "Oh, no," she said. "If I were attracted by attraction, there would be no one like Hussain. He looks like someone from a Mogul painting, lovely with a long curve of eyebrow, a thin waist, very long gentle hands-and inside here," she pointed to her head, "all empty. His heart is filled with popped rice, curly and white and isolated. Muslims know how to please a woman," she finished, rather sadly.
>
> "And a Hindu?"

A Hindu woman knows how to worship her Krishna, her Lord. When the moon shines over the Jumna and lights are lit in the households, and the cows are milked, then it is Janaki's son plays on the banks of the Yamuna in Brindavan. The cattle tear their ropes away, the deer leave the forests and come leaping to the groves, and with the peacocks seated on the branches of the Ashoka, Krishna dances on the red earth. What *Gopi*, my Lord, would not go to this festival of love? Women lose their shame and men lose their anger, for in Brindavan Krishna, the Lord, dances. We women are bidden to that feast. Come, she said, as though it was too much emotion to bear.

As we wandered down the streets, Piccadilly with its many colored lights, the Tube entrances and the bus queues gave us a sense of reality. Finally I took her to some women's hostel off Gower Street-where she always had rooms reserved for her and where she was looked after by her friend Gauri from Hyderabad, round as Savithri herself, but loquacious, big and protective. I was always so afraid of Savithri getting lost. It was not only a matter of bringing back her glasses or pen, but one always felt one had to bring Savithri back to Savithri.

"Ah, I am very real," she protested. "And tomorrow you will see how clever I am at taking buses. I'll jump into a 14 at Tottenham Court Road and be in Kensington at ten precise," she promised as I left her. I knew that at ten she would still be talking away to Gauri about some blouse pattern or somebody's marriage in Delhi. I knew I would have to telephone and ask her if she knew the time. "I promise you, you need not telephone. Tomorrow I will be punctual as Big Ben." With Savithri the profound and the banal lived so easily side by side.

I touched her hand at the door, to know I could touch her, and carried the feel of it home. It was like touching a thought, not just a thought of jug or water, or a pillow or a horse, but a thought as it leaps, as it were, in that instant where the thought lights itself, as the meteor its own tail. I felt it was of the substance of milk, of truth, of joy seen as myself.

Next day, when I was washed and dressed and had meditated and rested-I was in a muslin *dhoti* and *kurtha*-there was still no sign of Savithri at ten or at ten past ten. Not long after, she entered in a South Indian sari of a color we in Mysore call "color of the sky", with a peacock-gold *choli*, and a large *kumkum* on her forehead. She looked awed with herself, and full of reverence. As I went to touch her I refrained-something in her walk was strange.

> "I have been praying."
>
> "To whom?"
>
> "To Shiva," she whispered. Then she opened her bag and took out a sandal-stick. Her movements were made of erudite silences. "Please light this for me," she begged.

By the time I had lit the sandal-stick in the bathroom and come out she had spread her articles of worship about her. There was a silver *kumkum*-box. She had a few roses, too, fresh and dripping with water.

> "Bring me some Ganges water in this."
>
> I put some plain water in her silver plate. She put *kumkum* into the water.
>
> "Will you permit me?" she asked. "Permit this, a woman's business?"
>
> "Oh, no!" I protested.
>
> "But it was you who told me-at home a man obeys a woman, that it's Hindu dharma."
>
> "I obey," I said.

Then she knelt before me, removed one by one my slippers and my stockings and put them aside gently-distantly. She took flower and *kumkum*, and mumbling some song to herself, anointed my feet with them. Now she lit a camphor and placing the censer in the middle of the *kumkum*-water she waved the flame before my face, once, twice and three times in arathi.

After this she touched my feet with the water, and made aspersions of it over her head. Kneeling again and placing her head on my feet, she stayed there long, very long, with her breath breaking into gentle sobs. Then she gently held herself up. Taking the *kumkum* from the box I placed it on her brow, at the parting of her hair, and there where her bosom heaved, the abode of love. I could not touch her any more, nor could she touch me, and we stood for an isolate while. Then suddenly I remembered my mother's toe-rings.

"Stop where you are for a moment," I begged.

"I can go nowhere," she answered, "I belong to you."

Gently, as if lost in the aisles of a large temple, I walked about my room, opened my trunk and slowly removed the newspaper cover, then the coconut, the betel nuts, the *kumkum* that Little Mother had destined for her daughter-in-law. "I, too, had come prepared for this morning," I said.

"Really?" she smiled, for in me nothing astonished her.

"Yes, but it was a preparation made a very long time ago-a long, long time, Savithri. Not a life, not ten lives, but life upon life."

"Yes," she said. "This Cambridge undergraduate, who smokes like a chimney and dances to barbarian jazz, she says unto you, I've known my Lord for a thousand lives, from *Janam* to *Janam* have I known my Krishna."

"And the Lord knows himself because Radha is, else he would have gone into penance and sat on Himalaya. The Jamna flows and peacock feathers are on his diadem, because Radha's smiles enchant the creepers and the birds. Radha is the music of dusk, the red earth, the meaning of night. And this, my love, my spouse," I whispered, "is from my home. This is coconut, this is betel nut, this is *kumkum* and these the toe-rings my Mother wore, and left for my bridal."

Slowly, I anointed her with *kumkum* from my home, offered her the coconut and the betel nuts-there were eight, round and auspicious ones. "And now I shall place the toe-rings on your feet."

> "Never," she said angrily. "You may be a brahmin for all I know. But do you know of a Hindu woman who'd let her Lord touch her feet?"

"What a foolish woman you are!" I said, laughing. "And just by this you show why a Brahmin is necessary to educate you all, kings, queens, peasants and merchants. Don't you know that in marriage both the spouse and the espoused become anointed unto godhead? That explains why in Hindu marriages the married couple can only fall at the feet of the Guru and the Guru alone-for the Guru is higher than any god. Thus, I can now place them on your feet."

So much theology disturbed and convinced her, and she let me push the toe-rings on to her second toes, one on the left and the other on the right. The little bells on them whisked and sang: I was happy to have touched Savithri's feet. The toe-ring were the precise size for her. Little Mother was right: for Madeleine they would have been too big. Savithri sat on my bed, and the sun who had made himself such an auspicious presence fell upon her clear *Rajput* face as she sang Mira.

Sadhu matha ja.Sadhu matha ja.

O cenobite, O cenobite, do not go.

Make a pyre for me, and when I burn,

Put the ashes on your brow,

O cenobite, do not go.

We were at Victoria by nine o'clock. We were so happy and so sad altogether, as though no one could take us away from each other and nobody marry us again. We were not married that morning, we discovered, we had ever been married-else how understand that silent, whole knowledge of one another?

> "My love, my love," she repeated, as though it were a mantra, "my love, and my Lord."

> "And when will Italy be, and the bridge on the Arno, and the bambino?" I asked.

She put her head out of the window of the train, and for the first time I noticed the collyrium that tears had spread over her cheeks and face.

> "I promise you one thing," she said.

> "And what, Princess, may that be?" I replied, laughing.

> "Parvathi says she will come to Shiva, when Shiva is so lost in meditation that were he to open his eyes the three worlds would burn."

> "Meaning?" I was so frightened that my voice went awry and hollow.

> "I'll come when you don't need me, when you can live without me, O cenobite." I knew the absolute meaning of it, the exactitude, for Savithri could never whisper, never utter but the whole of the truth, even in a joke. But it was always like a sacred text, a cryptogram, with different meanings at different hierarchies of awareness.

"I understand and accept," I answered, with a clear and definite navel-deep voice. I can hear myself saying that to this day.

"Italy is," she continued, relentless, "when *Shivoham, Shivoham* is true."

"Meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile I go back to Allahabad and become Mrs Pratap Singh."

"And run the household of the new Governor," I added, to hide my acknowledgment and pain. For by now Pratap had become Personal Secretary to His Excellency the Governor of some Indian Province. "Palace or Government House, they're equal and opposite," I laughed.

"And what will the learned historian do?" she asked.

"Finish the history of the Cathars, and well-wed and twice-wed, become Professor of Medieval European History at some Indian University. India is large and very diverse," I pleaded.

"I shall always be a good pupil," she joked. The train whistled, and took her away.

I took a taxi, went back to the Stag-or the Bunch of Grapes, for I do not remember exactly-and stood a drink to some bearded painter who talked abstract art and had a beautiful face. Holy is a pub when one is holy oneself.

COMPANIONS

Alas till now I did not know My guide and Fate's guide are one. —*Hafiz*

It was a serpent, such as one sees only at a fair, long and many-coloured and swift in riposte when the juggler stops his music. But it had a secret of its own, which none knew except Moti Khan who brought him to the Fatehpur Sunday fair. The secret was: his fangs would lie without venom till the day Moti Khan should see the vision of the large white rupee, with the Qutub Minar on the one side and the face of the Emperor on the other. That day the fang would eat into his flesh and Moti Khan would only be a corpse of a man. Unless he find God.

For to tell you the truth, Moti Khan had caught him in the strangest of strange circumstances. He was, one day, going through the sitaphul wood of Rampur on a visit to his sister, and the day being hot and the sands all scorching and shiny, he lay down under a wild fig-tree, his turban on his face and his legs stretched across a stone. Sleep came like a swift descent of dusk, and after rapid visions of palms and hills and the dizzying sunshine, he saw a curious thing. A serpent came in the form of a man, opened its mouth, and through the most queer twistings of his face, declared he was Pandit Srinath Sastri of Totepur, who, having lived at the foot of the Goddess Lakshamma for a generation or more, one day in the ecstasy of his vision he saw her, the benign Goddess straight and supple, offering him two boons. He thought of his falling house and his mortgaged ancestral lands and said, without a thought: "A bagful of gold and liberation from the cycle of birth and death."

"And gold you shall have," said the Goddess, "but for your greed, you shall be born a serpent in your next life before reaching liberation. For gold and wisdom go in life like soap and oil. Go and be born a juggler's serpent. And when you have made the hearts of many men glad with the ripple and swing of your shining flesh, and you have gone like a bird amidst shrieking children, only to swing round their legs and to swing out to the amusement of them all, when you have climbed old men's shoulders and hung down them chattering like a squirrel, when you have thrust your hood at the virgin and circled round the marrying couples; when you have gone through the dreams of pregnant women and led the seekers to the top of the Mount of Holy Beacon, then your sins will be worn out like the quern with man's grindings and your flesh will catch fire, like the will-o'-the-wisp and disappear into the world of darkness, where men await the birth to come. The juggler will be a basket-maker and Moti Khan is his name. In a former life he sought God, but in this, he sits on the lap of a concubine. Wending his way to his sister's for the birth of her son, he will sleep in the sitaphul woods. Speak to him. And he will be the vehicle of your salvation." Thus spoke the Goddess.

> "Now, what do you say to that, Moti Khan?"
>
> "Yes, I've been a sinner. But never thought I, God and Satan would become one. Who are you?"
>
> "The very same serpent."
>
> "Your race has caused the fall of Adam."
>
> "I sat at the feet of Sri Lakshamma and fell into ecstasy. I am a Brahmin."
>
> "You are strange."
>
> "Take me or I'll haunt you for this life and all lives to come."

"Go, Satan!" shouted Moti Khan, and rising swift as a sword he started for his sister's house. He said to himself: "I will think of my sister and her child. I will think only of them." But leaves rustled and serpents came forth from the left and the right, blue ones, white ones, red ones, copper-coloured ones, long ones with short tails and short ones with bent tails, serpents dropped from treetops and rock-edges, serpents hissed on the river sands. Then Moti Khan stood by the Rampur stream and said: "Wretch! Stop it. Come, I'll take you with me." Then the serpents and the hissing, both disappeared and hardly home, he took a basket and put it in a corner. Then he slept. When he woke, a serpent had curled itself in the basket. Moti Khan had a *pungi* made by the local carpenter, and putting his mouth to it, he made the serpent dance. All the village and the animals gathered round him, for the music of Moti Khan was blue, and the serpent danced on his tail.

When he said good-bye to his sister, he did not take the road to his concubine but went straight northwards, for Allah called him there. And at every village men came to offer food to Moti Khan and women came to offer milk to the serpent, for it swung round children's legs and swung out, and cured them of all scars, poxes and fevers. Old men slept better after its touch. Women conceived on the very night they offered milk to it. Plague went and plenty came, but Moti Khan would not smell silver. That would be death.

> Now sometimes, at night in caravan-*serais*, they had wrangles. Moti Khan used to say: "You are not even a woman to put under oneself."
>
> "So many women come to see you. So many men come to honor you. Only a king could have had such a reception, though you're only a basket-maker."
>
> "Only a basket-maker! But I had a queen of a woman. When she sang her voice was all flesh and her flesh was all song. And she chewed betel-leaves and her lips were red, and even kings..."
>
> "Stop that. Between this and the vision of the rupee."
>
> Moti Khan pulled at his beard and, fire in his eyes, he broke his knuckles against the earth.
>
> "If only I could see a woman!"
>
> "If you want God, forget women, Moti Khan."
>
> "But I never asked for God. It is you, who bore me

> with God. I said I loved a woman. You are only a fanged beast. And here I am in the prime of life with a reptile to live with."

But suddenly temple bells rang, and the muezzin was heard to cry *Allah-o-Akbar*. No doubt it was all the serpent's work. Trembling, Moti Khan fell on his knees to pray.

From that day on, the serpent had one eye turned to the right and one to the left, when it danced. It looked at the men and then at the women. Suddenly it used to hiss up and slap Moti Khan's cheeks with the back of its head, for his music had fallen false and he was eyeing women. Round were their hips, he would think, and the eyelashes are black and blue, and the breasts are pointed like young mangoes, and their limbs so tremble and flow that he could sweetly melt into them.

One day, however, there was at the market a dark blue woman, with red lips, young and sprightly; and she was a butter woman. She came and stood by Moti Khan as he made the serpent dance. He played and he played on his bamboo *pungi* and music swung here and splashed there, and suddenly he looked at her and her eyes and her breasts and the *nagaswara* went and became *moha-swara*, and she felt it and he felt she felt it; and when night came, he thought and thought so much of her and she thought and thought so much of him, that he slipped to the *serai* door and she came to the *serai* gate, flower in her hair and perfume on her limbs, but lo! like the sword of God came a long, rippling light, circled round them, pinched at her nipples and flew back into the bewildering night. She cried out, and the whole town waked, and Moti Khan thrust the basket under his arm and walked northwards, for Allah called him thither.

"Now," said Moti Khan, "I have to find God. Else this creature will kill me. And the Devil knows the hell I'd have to bake in." So he decided that, at the next saint's tomb he encountered, he would sit down and meditate. But he wandered and he wandered; from one village he went to another, from one fair he went to another, but he found no *dargah* to meditate by. For God always called him northwards and northwards, and he crossed the jungles and he went up the mountains, and he came upon narrow valleys, where birds screeched here and deer frisked there, but no man's voice was to be heard, and he said: "Now let me turn back home;" but he looked back and he was afraid. And he said: "Now I have to go to the North, for Allah calls me there."

And he climbed mountains again, and ran through jungles, and then came broad plains, and he went to the fairs and made the snake dance, and people left their rice shops and cotton-ware shops and the bellowing cattle and the yoked threshers and the querns and the kilns, and came to hear him play the music and to see the snake dance. They gave him food, fruit and cloth, but when they said: "Here's a coin," he said: "Nay." And the snake was right glad of it, for he hated to kill Moti Khan till he had found God, and he himself hated to die. Now, when Moti Khan had crossed the Narbada and the Pervan and the Bhagirath, he came to the Jumna, and through long Agra he passed making the snake dance, and yet he could not find God and he was sore in soul with it. And the serpent was bothersome.

But at Fatehpur Sikri, he said: "Here is Sheikh Chisti's tomb and I would rather starve and die than go one thumb-length more." He sat by Sheikh Chisti's tomb and he said: "Sheikh Chisti, what is this Fate has sent me? This serpent is a very wicked thing. He just hisses and spits fire at every wink and waver. He says, Find God. Now, tell me, Sheikh Chisti, how can I find Him? Till I find Him I will not leave this spot."

But even as he prayed he saw snakes sprout through his head, fountains splashed and snakes fell gently to the sides like the waters by the Taj, and through them came women, soft women, dancing women, round hips, betel-chewed lips, round breasts-shy some were, while some were only minxes-and they came from the right and went to the left, and they pulled at his beard-and, suddenly, white serpents burst through the earth and enveloped them all, but Moti Khan would not move. He said: "Sheikh Chisti, I am in a strange world. But there is a darker world I see behind, and beyond that dark, dark world, I see a brighter world, and there, there must be Allah."

For twenty nine days he knelt there, his hands pressed against his ears, his face turned towards Sheikh Chisti's tomb. And people came and said: "Wake up, old man, wake up;" but he would not answer. And when they found the snake lying on the tomb of Sheikh Chisti they cried: "This is a strange thing." And they took to their heels; while others came and brought *mullahs* and *maulvis* but Moti Khan would not answer. For, to speak the truth, he was crossing through the dark waters, where one strains and splashes, and where the sky is all cold, and the stars all dead, and till man come to the other shore, there shall be neither peace nor God.

On the twenty ninth night Sheikh Chisti woke from his tomb and came, his skullcap and all, and he said: "My son, what may I give you?"

"Peace from this serpent—and God."

"My son, God is not to be seen. He is everywhere."

"Eyes to see God, for I cannot any more go northwards."

"Eyes to discern God you shall have."

"Then peace from this serpent."

"Faithful shall he be, companion of the God-seeker."

"Peace to all men and women," said Moti Khan.

"Peace to all mankind. Further, Moti Khan, I have

> something to tell you; as dawn breaks *Maulvi* Mohammed Khan will come to offer you his daughter, fair as an oleander. She has been waiting for you and she will wed you. My blessings on you, my son!"

"Allah is found! Victory to Allah!" cried Moti Khan. The serpent flung round him, slipped between his feet and curled round his neck and danced on his head, for, when Moti Khan found God, his sins would be worn out like the quern-stone with the grindings of man, and there would be peace in all mankind.

Moti Khan married the devout daughter of *Maulvi* Mohammed Khan and he loved her well, and he settled down in Fatehpur Sikri and became the guardian of Sheikh Chisti's tomb. The serpent lived with him, and now and again he was taken to the fair to play for the children.

One day, however, Moti Khan's wife died and was buried in a tomb of black marble. Eleven months later Moti Khan died and he was given a white marble tomb, and a dome of the same stone, for both. Three days after that the serpent died too, and they buried him in the earth beside the *dargah*, and gave him a nice clay tomb. A *pipal* sprang up on it, and a passing Brahmin planted a *neem*-tree by the *pipal*, and some merchant in the village gave money to build a platform round them. The *pipal* rose to the skies and covered the dome with dark, cool shade, and Brahmins planted snake-stones under it, and bells rang and camphors were lit, and married couples went round the platform in circumambulation. When the serpent was offered the camphor, Moti Khan had the incense. And when illness comes to the town, with music and flags and torches do we go, and we fall in front of the *pipal*-platform and we fall prostrate before the *dargah*, and right through the night a wind rises and blows away the foul humors of the village. And when children cry, you say: "Moti Khan will cure you, my treasure," and they are cured.

Emperors and kings have come and gone but never have they destroyed our village. For man and serpent are friends, and Moti Khan found God.

Between Agra and Fatehpur Sikri you may still find the little tomb and the *pipal*. Boys have written their names on the walls and dust and leaves cover the gold and blue of the pall. But someone has dug a well by the side, and if thirst takes you on the road, you can take a drink and rest under the *pipal*, and think deeply of God.

The Saint and the Sage: The Fiction of Raja Rao

When UNESCO officials asked Raja Rao to write a book on India, he replied that India did not exist. As the central figure in his novel *The Serpent and the Rope* says, "Anybody can have the geographic even the political India; it matters little. India is not a country like France is, or like England; India is an idea, a metaphysic." Strangely enough, this concept, which ultimately questions India's material existence, helped shape the Indian Revolution. It lies, too, at the heart of Raja Rao's fiction, and his devotion to it has helped him create out of an adopted language one of the few truly unique styles in Third World literature.

Third World writers often accuse each other of being imitative, tame. They bicker about cultural imperialism, and not without reason. Much Third World literature is written not in native languages, but in Western languages and after Western literary forms; and most Third World writers, even the brilliant ones, have indeed developed literary sensibilities and approaches to language and form that are heavily Westernized. But is Spanish or French or English supple enough to reproduce the ambience of, say, Igbo or Malayalam speech? Do Western form and native sensibility clash? If, for example, a writer comes from a Third World culture which views man as having little personal history and standing essentially outside time, will there not be a problem in conveying that view if he uses the Western novel form, which, at least traditionally, assumes and focuses on personal identity developing in time? Surely, synthesis is the problem, for it is too simplistic to assume, as many militant Third World writers seem to do, that colonialism is really a lesser historical phenomenon whose cultural influences can someday be completely neutralized. Still, it is true that too many writers, too much seduced by Western form and language, have unconsciously given up, or made quite secondary, the sensitive rendering of their own culture's vision.

Of the few writers who have managed to synthesize forms and idioms out of the clash of the native and Western, one certainly thinks of Raja Rao, whom many consider the most brilliant Indian ever to write fiction in English. Forty years ago, in a preface to his first book *Kanthapura,* he wrote one of the first manifestos on Third World literary style.

> English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up like Sanskrit or Persian was before but not of our emotional make-up. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as a part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.
>
> After language the next problem is that of style. The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression...We, in India, think quickly, and when we move we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on...The *Mahabharata* has 214,788 verses and the *Ramayana* 48,000...Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our storytelling.

This 1937 preface remains to my mind the most eloquent and enticing guide to style a Third World writer can have, and Raja Rao's growing understanding of his own statement has manifested itself in two other celebrated works, *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1967). Together with *Kanthapura,* they have become prime models in world literature, showing how profoundly one language can be made to serve the very soul of another culture.

Kanthapura is set in the early 30s, around the time Gandhi made his salt marches. Moorthy, a young Brahmin transformed by Gandhi's spirit into a revolutionary, comes back from the city to Kanthapura and attempts to cut across traditional boundaries of caste in order to create a unified front against the British.

Even for himself, however, this assault on tradition is shocking. When he first enters a Pariah house the room seems to shake, and the gods and ancestors seem to cry out. Afterwards, feeling faint, he washes with Ganges water, and Achakka, the book's narrator, says: "Afterall a Brahmin is a Brahmin, sister!" How much more, then, do others resist Moorthy's reforms. Until he himself has a spiritual awakening (an incident we shall return to shortly), his efforts remain relatively ineffectual. When Kanthapura finally is unified, it inspires more rebellion. The British retaliate, wasting the village and dispersing its inhabitants, but the impact has been made. Surprisingly, Raja Rao was not arrested for sedition, for he clearly meant tiny Kanthapura to be an example of the type of courage and unity that could expel the British.

Outwardly, the book's form is quite Western. It is told, first of all, by a narrator in the first person with a limited point of view. Most important, it has, in the tradition of Western historical narrative, a pointed, linear plot which Raja Rao has shaped with tight logic on a balanced curve which reaches its apex in chapter ten, the book's exact center. Chapter one is balanced with chapter 19, chapter two with 18, and so on. In chapter seven, for example, Moorthy goes on a fast, attempting to become radiant with *ahimsa* (love; literally, noncruelty). He asks only for some salt to put in his water. In chapter 13 meditation finally bears fruit in action, and Moorthy's request for salt is echoed as news reaches the village that Gandhi has embarked on his salt march. Yet tight, logical structure is neither the first nor last impression *Kanthapura* makes. Rather the novel sprawls and digresses, and features, besides, 60 pages of notes on Indian culture and history arranged by chapter at the back of the book. At times these notes seem as interesting as the novel itself; so when the narrator, Achakka, mentions Ravanna, for example, one turns to the notes; and since Ravanna, or the Cauvery River, or Shakuntala is likely to be mentioned in a digression, the notes extend that digression, sometimes forcing slow movement through the text.

The text, however, does not move slowly, for Achakka, a fantastically garrulous old woman presumably telling her tale to a group addressed only as "sisters," is perhaps the fastest, most prolix talker in world literature. She begins:

> Our village, I don't think you have ever heard about it, Kanthapura is its name, and it is in the province of Kara. High on the Ghats is it, high up on the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar coast is it, up Mangalore and Puttur and many a centre of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugar cane. Roads, narrow, dusty, rut-covered roads, wind through the forest of teak and of jack, of sandal and sal, and hanging over bellowing gorges and leaping over elephant-haunted valleys, they turn now to the left and now to the right and bring you…into the great granaries of trade. There, on the blue waters, they say, our carted cardamoms and coffee get into the ships the Red-men bring, and, so they say, they go across the seven oceans into the countries where our rulers live.

She is something of a poet especially in her descriptions of nature and evocations of Indian culture but also a master gossip, telling us of squabbles, and houses, and who is jealous of whom (and why). Serious or frivolous, her words always pour forth in a near-breathless, near-torrential, near-endless rush which the American critic Charles Larson describes as an "oral stream of consciousness."

Another American critic says, however, that the book's style becomes monotonous over its 180-page length. The style is "dominated by *and, then, but, when,* and *now,*" says Robert J. Ray, and "one sequence follows another without emphasis or control." In fact, though Rao had promised just this relentless rush of words and episodes, he appears to have run into a problem that has plagued many other literary works, Third World or otherwise, that use simple country or native narrators: the usually flat, repetitious syntax of such speakers is unable to buoy a long written narrative. In *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare* (which *are* better books) the narrators are quite sophisticated, and while the rhythm of Indian speech is still fully retained, the syntax of parataxis and simple coordination dominating *Kanthapura* gives way to what Robert J. Ray now describes as "paradoxical language patterns that are stunning, subtle, profound, and beautiful." Rao's artistic craft, says Ray, has become "the most profound in the history of Indo-Anglian literature, perhaps in the history of contemporary literature."

Ray's somewhat justified criticism of *Kanthapura* may be lessened, however, if we can learn to hear the rhythm and inflection of Indian speech and understand the peculiar literary synthesis Raja Rao is attempting. In a letter to M.K. Naik, Rao says that all his writings are:

> ...an attempt at "puranic" recreation of Indian storytelling: that is to say, the story, as story, is conveyed through a thin thread to which are attached (or which passes through) many other

> stories, fables and philosophical disquisitions, like a *mala* (garland).

Kanthapura is modeled not so much after the novel as the *shthala-purana,* or legendary history, which oral or written is chatty, digressive, amply laced with allusions, hymns, stories, and sayings. Even though *Kanthapura* has a few interesting characters and a tight, logical framework, Achakka's torrential, digressive voice overwhelms and was meant to overwhelm all and work against the sense of controlled, historical progress or sequence. For the real protagonist of *Kanthapura* has neither personal character nor history: it is India the idea, the metaphysic which we may better understand if we return now to Moorthy's spiritual awakening and the political context in which it occurs.

Indian political life, says W. H. Morris Jones, is conducted in three major languages: the modern, traditional, and saintly which, for reasons I hope shall become apparent, I wish to rename the "sagely."

> The first is the language of the Indian elite which has mastery over the grammar and accents of British rule....The "traditional idiom" ...is spoken in rural India and knows little about anything as big as India…Caste is the core of traditional politics…

The idiom of the sage has been the language of the venerable Sankara, of Sri Aurobindo, and Gandhi, and is based on the central text of Hinduism, *Tat tvam asi* (Thou art that), which occurs in the second Upanishad, *Chandogya.* Here the sage Uddalaka Aruni uses nine illustrations to point out the oneness of the individual and the universal. *Tat tvam asi* gives rise to the doctrine of radical monism, which holds that all things are ultimately one. It rejects subject-object dualism, moves away from the object and from history, and believes the world illusory not materially real, but arising from the perceptions of the self, which is ultimately identical with the Absolute Self whose highest expression is *ahimsa.*

"Seeing oneself," says the central figure in *The Serpent and the Rope,* "is what we always seek; the world, as the great sage Sankara said, is like a city seen in a mirror."

Raja Rao fondly tells the story of how Nehru, on a speaking tour, arrives in a village so tired he cannot speak. Still the villagers respond with hearty rallying cries of the Revolution, "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai! Jai hind!" (Victory to the Mahatma! To India!). Nehru asks, "When you say these things, what do you mean?" "We do not know," they say. "When you say "Jai hind," says Nehru, "you mean "Be true to yourself." Here a "modern," Nehru, goes to the "traditional" and offers a "sagely" interpretation. "India is the Indian people," says Rao, "and those people are ultimately not themselves but the Absolute." To varying degrees each major leader of the Indian

Revolution tried to blend the call for political unity with this sagely spirit of radical oneness found in the scriptures and rooted deeply in Indian culture. That spirit is India the idea, the metaphysic, and it is the connection between politics and *tat tvam asi* that Moorthy realizes during his awakening.

Only partially transformed by Gandhi's example, Moorthy is at first a mere modern trying to remake the traditional without the transcending power of the sagely vision. "And this is how it all began," says Achakka:

> That evening Moorthy speaks to Rangamma on the veranda and tells her he will fast for three days in the temple, and Rangamma says, "What for, Moorthy?" and Moorthy says that much violence had been done because of him, and that were he full of the radiance of *ahimsa* such things should never have happened, but Rangamma says, "That was not your fault, Moorthy!" to which he replies, "The fault of others, Rangamma, is the fruit of one's own disharmony."

Some villagers actually scold Moorthy for his new "gilded purity," but he "slips back into the foldless sheath of the soul," and falling prostrate in the temple chants Sankara's "Sivoham, Sivoham. I am Siva. I am Siva. Siva am I."

In the end, feeling that Gandhi is not practical enough, Moorthy seems to turn away from the sagely vision and go to Nehru, the modern. But, as Raja Rao has said, Moorthy is immature and impatient: the only "practical" way, finally, is the way of the sage. Thus, except for a one-paragraph wrap-up by Achakka, *Kanthapura* ends not with Moorthy's tentativeness but with Gandhi's 1931 trip to England. That event, however, is not spoken of in historical terms, but, significantly, in terms of Indian myth and tradition:

> They say the Mahatma will go to the Redman's country and he will get us Swaraj. He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall be happy. And Rama will come back from exile, and Sita will be with him, for Ravanna will be slain and Sita freed, and he will come back with Sita on his right in a chariot of the air and brother Bharata will go to meet them with the worshipped sandal of the Master on his head. And as they enter Ayodha there will be a rain of flowers.

The ever-present India mythos finally absorbs the characters and history it has all along been bathing and overwhelming.

For Raja Rao, myth is more real than fact, for myth leads fact out of itself, into the general, and finally into the realm of the nonmaterial Absolute, the One whose highest expression is *ahimsa. Tat tvam asi* gives to Indian aesthetics a movement diametrically opposed to the aesthetic tendencies of the West, especially as manifested in realism. Ian Watt tells us that the rise of the novel in the West coincides with a philosophical movement towards the particular. Thus the novel's preoccupation with human personality and the look of reality. Thus the giving, very early, of individualizing rather than generalizing fictional names (Moll Flanders *vs.* Mr.

Badman). On the other hand, as the central figure in *The Serpent and the Rope* says, "India is perhaps the only nation that throughout history has questioned the existence of the world—of the object."

The core and goal of Indian aesthetics is the *rasa*, a corollary of radical monism. The *rasa*, says Edward Gerow,...is a generalized emotion, one from which all elements of particular consciousness are expunged: the time of the artistic event, the preoccupations of the witness (audience), the specific or individuating qualities of the play or novel itself, place and character, and so on...

Generalization is the key to Indian aesthetics, and the means to it, to the *rasa*, are many, though usually related to rhythm, and incantation and deep immersion in myth, tradition, and philosophical disquisition. (All these, except for philosophical disquisition, are evident in the tempo and digressiveness of Achakka's voice.) If the traditional artist is successful, the audience loses awareness of itself and apprehends the character Rama, for example, not as himself or even the love he represents: he and the audience would become love. "Brother, my brother," goes a line in *The Serpent and the Rope*, "the world is not beautiful—you are beauty. Be beauty and see not the beautiful."

In Raja Rao's synthesis, then, there is an exquisite contrariety of motion between establishing individuality on the one hand as with the unforgettable Govindan Nair in *The Cat and Shakespeare* and undermining that individuality with constant, overt pressure towards the general, towards the revelation that that individual is not himself but the Absolute. Of course, for Raja Rao the Absolute must prevail, and as he pursues the implications of *tat tvam asi* further and further, his style becomes more antirealistic in a way that is kin to, but, one should note, much more radical than the anti-realism that animates so many of the classics of modern and contemporary literature in the West. Reviewing James Joyce's

Ulysses, for example, T.S. Eliot said that Joyce had found a way of using myth to control, order, and give "shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." But to use myth in this way is to put the greater reality too much in service to the lesser. Revolted by both historical chaos and historical determinism, the West nonetheless remains historical, committed to redeeming history, or unwilling, at least, to consider it illusory. For Raja Rao the function of myth is to dispel history. Yet myth is only a halfway house to the real. "I want to bring myth up to the Real," says Rao, "not down to history."

Philosophy carries us beyond myth. Gabriel Marcel once told Rao that the Indians scared him because whereas the West went from philosophy to God, they went from God to philosophy. It is just this element of philosophical disquisition, generally absent from *Kanthapura,* that saturates the pages of *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare,* taking us further away from the object, from history, from the world.

7

The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of Modern India

An Act of Reconciliation

The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of Modern India (1965), Raja Rao's third novel, admittedly a sequel to *The Serpent and the Rope,* takes up the theme of the metaphysical quest from the point at which Ramaswamy's story has carried it, and shows the next step in this quest. After the confusion and groping in *Kanthapura,* and the agony of crisis in *The Serpent and the Rope,* Rao's quest for form at last arrives at the destination in *The Cat and Shakespeare,* where Rao comes nearest to a synthesis to embody his metaphysics in a literary form, without that pronounced conflict which upset the structural balance in *Kanthapura* and rent the fictional fabric of *The Serpent and the Rope*. His intellectual position may be found crystallized in the words of Ramaswamy, his hero: "I am, therefore, the world is." The central problem of Rao as a creative writer lies in the relationship between this essentially monistic standpoint and the adaptation of the novel to its literary expression, which most of Rao's critics usually miss.'

The novel as a literary genre has evolved out of a fundamentally pluralist state of mind associated with liberal humanism.' This pluralistic view is basically Christian in its candid acceptance of the individual existence as real. So the suffering, the misery, of man also possesses intrinsic reality, to be redeemed by the Son of Man. But for Raja Rao, the only reality is the Absolute, "there is no world" and individual existence is completely illusory. His rigid non-dualist point of view is essentially monist and his hero Ramaswamy therefore argues that Madeleine's humanism, Christian and Buddhist, in accepting the reality of the individual and of the world, is opposed to his "Indian" metaphysics:

> To have compassion, remember, presupposes the *existence of the world*. You must have compassion towards some suffering *thing*, so suffering exists and compassion as well.

But the world does not exist as an independent reality in his philosophy, so his "India" is a concept which does not recognize human suffering and offers rather cruel comfort: "India is *impitoyable*" (i.e. without pity). The question then is, for what did Christ die on the Cross? It is the story of the Passion of Christ that underlies the development of the novel as a typical literary form of the West. In the evolution of Raja Rao as a novelist, the rejection of Madeleine symbolizes the rejection of humanism, Buddhist as well as Christian, while the representational form of the novel is based on the humanist/Christian assumption which is pluralistic. The plurality of existence stubbornly refuses to be contained in the theoretical paradigm of rigid non-duality, nor can a representational living mode be subjected to a pre-fabricated mould. In the evolution as an artist therefore both the philosophic point of view as well as the representational mode have to undergo transformation.

The tension in the form of the earlier novel was generated by the author's problematic relation with reality which caused a marked oscillation between a complete surrender to the chaos of contingency or a total distancing from even the fictional reality. In the crisis of violent action in *Kanthapura*, the narrative technique almost collapsed in a vain attempt to retain the distinction from life which is however totally given up in the resolution of *The Serpent and the Rope* when we find

Trivandrum, without any rhyme or reason in the fictional world so far depicted, becomes the end of Ramaswamy's agonized quest. On the other hand, the last lingering impression of the grandmother and the aged in *Kanthapura* fades away in a fantasy, Ramaswamy and Savithri in *The Serpent and the Rope* cease to be fictional characters and are substituted by mythical prototypes consciously by themselves. In both cases, the linear progression of the traditional form based on an assumption of causal development finds the resolution particularly problematic. In *The Cat and Shakespeare* the narration itself appears to be a series of "non-happenings" which may be summarized in the following order:

1. Ramakrishna Pai, a brahman clerk in the Revenue Department at Trivandrum, in Kerala, lives estranged from his wife, Saroj a, who is always busy looking after parental property and their children. At Trivandrum, Pai's life revolves round his neighbour Govindan Nair, a clever resourceful clerk who works in the Ration Office and talks about Vedanta in an English flavoured with Shakespearean turns and phrases, and his mistress, Shantha.
2. Nair, with true neighbourly concern, attends upon Pai when he is afflicted with dreadful bubos and points out the desirability of having a house of one's own since his mistress Shantha is pregnant 3. The mystery of multiplication of ration cards is set forth in the ration office. With Velayudhan Nair, an expert in such jugglery, Govindan Nair goes to a "Doctor's clinic" and meets a young whore "with necklace, black hair and rich bosom," to whom he expounds Vedanta and leaves a ration shop licence no. 9181.
3. Nair pays for Pai's house acquired in his daughter Usha's name.
4. Nair's son Shridhar, playmate of Usha, dies and Shantha comes to live with Pai and Usha.
5. Nair is arrested on a charge of having taken bribe

from an old woman, whose son, the owner of a ration shop, has suddenly be-come rich.

6. No.6 is actually a consequence of no. 7, in which John presents a cat to Nair in the office because everybody has heard repeatedly Nair's philosophy of life, "Learn the way of the kitten, then you're saved. Allow the mother cat carry you." While Nair and his colleagues indulge in a mock-Hamlet scene, expatiating on to-be or not-to-be, the cat jumps on the boss Bhoothalinga Iyer's head and he dies of heart failure.
7. The cat, left to Pai and Shantha, is taken to the court during Nair's trial and it points out the incriminating file. A ray of light from above reveals Bhoothalinga Iyer's signature and Nair is set free.
8. The cat, now permanently with Pai, leads him to a garden, just outside the wall, where he finds "truth not as fact but as ignition." Govindan Nair, transferred from Trivandrum, leaves Pai who continues to live with Shantha and play at house building.

It is evident from this brief summary that the focus of *The Cat and Shakespeare* does not lie in the narration of a story of life, unfolded chronologically. The diminution of the narrative has to be made up with an alternative aesthetic ordering. It will be of course drastic to suggest that the story has disappeared completely; rather, it may be found "automatized," that is, its function has changed from the main or referential to the auxiliary, which is in this novel, symbolic. This change in the function of the plot is not however as erratic as some readers have found, because it does possess a literary background. As Jurij Tynjanov holds:

> In a work in which the so-called plot is effaced, the story carries out different functions than in a work, in which it is not effaced. The story might be used merely to motivate style or as a strategy for developing the material.

We must however remember that there are some vividly "realistic" patches in *The Cat and Shakespeare,* which have been noticed by critics. For example, the social context of Kerala's unique Brahman-Nair extramarital relation renders to the unconventional man-woman situation a semblance of verisimilitude which would have been difficult to effect in any other Hindu community of the Indian subcontinent where a similar union would have created a great deal of social and psychological problems. The historical background of the Second World War throws up the rationing system which supplies the appropriate milieu for the guru Govindan Nair's roguish philosophy. The pervasive corruption, an offshoot of rationing, leads to determine the "action" of the novel in two ways.

Firstly, it makes Nair's arrest and trial possible and his precept of Cat-and-Kitten is literally translated into reality. He has followed the way of the Kitten and has been saved by the mother Cat in flesh and blood. Secondly, Pai's purchase of the house depends to a large extent on Nair's financial assistance which seems to stem from a mysterious unspecified source of income. Yet the realism of *The Cat and Shakespeare,* despite the vividness of isolated scenes and manipulation of historical background, is not motivated towards the traditional representational mode as it has been in Rao's former novels.

Here, as in Kafka's novels, the realistic details are utilized for a distinct transcendental significance. The situations in Rao's work are all banal, indeed no less than Kafka's lawcourt or the castle as the source of realistic descriptions. But these are subsumed under assessments which are not at all guided by the realistic interest of social and historical import, for, through the chinks of the fictional world in its mundane appearance, lurk the invisible forces of the transcendental which is not so much emphasized as embodied in the very banality. Ordinary items of human experience are charged with a meaning and value which transcend all normal realistic possibilities. The mode in which *The Cat and Shakespeare* is presented is more illustrative than imitative, more symbolic than realistic.

In *The Serpent and the Rope* too we have seen Rao's attempt at manipulation of symbols. But there the form is realistic and as such, symbols are embedded, as we have seen, in the immediate context, in the semantics of the situation alone. The repetition of *bridge, mountain, ant, elephant* are motifs of decorative rhetoric in the traditional structure. The *bridge* may have stood for the distance between the phenomenon and the noumenon, *mountain* for the vertical ascent towards spiritual realization, *ants* for the unthinking animal existence or *elephants* for erotic frenzy; but these do not control the story of Ramaswamy in his journey to the Absolute through his encounters with women. At no critical stage do these symbols lead to the development of the narrative. Their function, largely, is to lend richness to the narrative texture through poetic approximation.

But in *The Cat and Shakespeare* symbols control the total form because it purports to be a "metaphysical comedy." In the Christian sense, the term "comedy" implies the formulation of salvation, the great prototype of which is offered at the end of Dante's *Divine Comedy.*' The epithet "metaphysical" particularly insists on this aspect to be distinguished from the social and secular varieties which are more common. Ramakrishna Pai, the narrator-hero, is just an average human male, an Everyman, as he says, "I am not particularly tall or fair or good or bad. I am just a man." His aspiration is mundane, he just wants a house of his own where he can live with his woman and child. But this house is also a tabernacle, the symbol of earthly existence of a soul that fundamentally belongs to the Divine.

So his small white house has "an ochre band on it—almost as on a temple" for the colour ochre is traditionally associated with spirituality in India. Pai constantly thinks of extending the' house upwards, adding more storeys, since the vertical progress is a well-known pattern of transcendence. As the house is like a temple, the temporary abode of a soul whose home is the Lord Himself, it displays some deities in the form of windows: these all open towards the sea-the infinite expanse of water, the very, symbol of primordial creation. "A window on the sea is a window on God." Pai's little house continually echoes with the sound of the waves from the sea as if a continual reminder of the divine creation. Pai's mistress Shantha is allied to the divine creator in her role as a mother. So Shantha, carrying four months, has a mysterious affinity with the sea ("the sea knows me," says Shantha). It is to the swelling crest of the waves that her motherhood supplicates for a child.

So, like the sea, her connection with Pai's house is inextricable. She represents, in human form, this existence, the creative aspect of the Supreme. So she is constantly occupied with house and land. She is referred to as "Vazhavankad- house" by Govindan Nair as though she could be equated with stone or mortar. "In fact her house is she." She imparts security to Pai's life as the wall which encloses the house does by delimiting It. Pm, safe and certain with his woman and children, lives in the spot on the earth given to him-his life rotating in the eternal groove of man's existence on this earth since time immemorial. But beyond this cycle of time lies the Apocalypse, the garden which embodies redemption. It is the journey of the Everyman Ramakrishna Pai from the house to the garden that constitutes the significance of the pilgrim's progress from Time into Eternity.

This Christian pattern presents "rosy" as a qualifier of the garden. In Rao's story, *The Policeman and the Rose*, the narrator hero is "arrested" as soon as he is born into existence, he is finally redeemed by a rose, for the rose, an apocalyptic flower, stands for Grace.' No less significant is the entirely gratuitous nature of the Grace that Pai often hopes for. He does not exactly search for it or undergo any spiritual effort or *sadhana* which plays such a dominant role in all systems of Indian religion, Hindu, Buddhist and Jain. Pai, led by the mother cat, arrives at the garden and is blessed with the vision of the Supreme. He has done nothing to deserve grace which is here completely free. One finds the efforts of Govindan Nair, maybe, though perhaps inexplicably, related to Pai's salvation which seems a kind of windfall. It is Nair who "does" things for Pai out of his love for a neighbour. The importance of grace and compassion for the Other in this novel by Rao can be properly understood only against the background of Rao's own previous "Indian" stand in *The Serpent and the Rope*, that stems from an uncompromising non-dualism which the author him-self often reveals in interviews:

> Indian civilization is based on the idea that every person must seek his spiritual guide. *Among the Hindus you will not find the cult of Christian charity.* The Hindu conception of *Dharma* is quite different. In doing your *dharma* you also express your love. In the Christ and in the Buddha there is a special form of compassion for your neighbour.

In the original French of this interview, Rao presents an illustration of this basic difference:

> Ainsien 1943 lors de la grand famine du Bengale il y a euun enorme exode sur Calcutta, et trois millions d'etres sont morts dans les rues de la ville tandis que d'autres festoyaient dans les restaurants; et il n 'y eut pas a signaler la moindre revolte. Cela illustre bien les differences entre les attitudes hindoue et catholique.

Surprisingly, in the novel where he admits to have concluded his Indian/Hindu pilgrimage, Govindan Nair, the prime mover of action, overflows with the milk of human kindness for the Other, his neighbour Pai. It is precisely the compassion for the neighbour that is revealed in Nair's uncalled-for service to Pai lying unconscious with dreadful bubos. This compassionate behaviour is certainly non-Hindu, if the acquiescence to the fact of three million starving people dying without rebellion in front of Calcutta restaurants feasting with food during the great Bengal famine, is the yardstick of Rao's Hindu *dharma*. No bond of Hindu *dharma* impels Nair to arrange for the purchase of Pai's house or to slip in money through the window whenever a child cries. His role as a guru does by no stretch of logic go beyond his expounding Brahman to the brahman.

No doubt, it is as a guru that he points to Pai the right way to salvation-not through wisdom (which Rao so incessantly equates with Indian civilization as does his hero Ramaswamy in *The Serpent and the Rope)* but through a complete resignation to faith, with that total surrender without any stain of doubt or effort which we find in a kitten as it is so securely carried in the mouth of the mother cat. For Nair, the way of the kitten is the road to salvation, because man is redeemed by grace. The question is, does the Absolute Consciousness or Brahman of Raja Rao who seems to equate "India" with non-dualism bestow· grace? The passage of grace is always downwards as Simone Weil observes, "La Grace, c'est la loi du mouvement descendant." Hence the 'falling of sacred leaves indicates in this novel the blessings of the Lord.

It presupposes a fundamental qualitative difference between man and God-a difference which Rao's' non-dualism can never accept, nor can it have a personal God who out of His love for humanity bestows grace freely. Hence the place of *sadhana* or spiritual endeavour is of supreme importance, In Christianity, on the other hand, the Cross of Christ seems to bear the whole burden of human sin and constitute the basis of grace which is naturally gratuitous.

If a Christian, being a sinner is saved by his God, it does not indicate arbitrariness on the part of God, for the price has been paid by the Son of God Himself: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," *(Romans 5:8)*, So when we find Ramakrishna Pai, a Hindu without any *sadhana* to his credit, blessed with the vision of Beatitude, the strength of the gratuitous grace perhaps lies in the fundamental dogma of Christianity in which it is always a free gift.

Rao's comedy has therefore to strive for synthesis' in the concept of the neighbour, to love whom has been so far the duty of the Christian (or the Buddhist) alone. "I sing of man'," says Ramkrishna Pai," because he is my neighbour. After all, one's big neighbour is oneself. The neighbour's neighbour is always the Self."

The rejection of Christ and humanism in *The Serpent and the Rope* is atoned for here in this acceptance of man and neighbour. Govindan Nair the guru goes to prison, as though in atonement for the whole corrupt life going on in the ration shop, as well as for the "extramarital propensities" of his boss. Whether this affair is a cock-and-bull story or whether Nair is really innocent of the charge against him we are not sure. But this temporary bondage of Nair makes the redemption of Pai, his neighbour, possible, for Nailr's cat is left with Shantha to teach Pai the kitten's way to salvation. One may even simplistically formulate that Nair dies a temporary' death so that Pai, the Everyman, may be redeemed.

This underlying Christian pattern comes to the forefront' in the mystic experience of Pai which is the high watermark of this novel and is worth considering. The journey he undertakes from the existence of the house to the essence in the garden is but a, graded progress in space, and the passage from one to the other needs no vertical leap. Pai, after toying with the idea of building three storeys, stops at only two: "I will never build a house three storeys high. Have you ever seen a house so high, no, not in Trivandrum', Raja Rao himself ended his spiritual quest at the feet of a guru in Trivandrum. "When you come to Trivandrum," writes Rao, "you feel you've come home. For Trivandrum is the home of the home-less. Everybody is born homeless." Trivandrum, therefore, is a macrocosm in relation to Pai's house, and a microcosm in the back-ground of the whole creation, just as the tree that stands by the wall is a form of the Apocalyptic garden, a descendant of the Cosmic Tree, the source of the twin trees of knowledge and life. Its leaves are trefoil, indicative of the Divine Trinity.

Pai's predecessor Ramaswamy also was aware of the symbolism of the tree, particularly because of the Buddha's enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and concluded, "all men are but pilgrims of the Tree." Rao's Shaivite bias makes it a *bilva* tree, sacred to Shiva, and elevates it to the position of the cosmic tree with a multiplicity of symbolic functions." This tree is the symbol of birth, growth and death as also of regeneration. So Shantha, big with child, is seen under the tree: Nair's son Sridhar plays here with Usha and once here in the rain catches pneumonia to die. At the same time the falling of its leaves presents salvation to Pai who constantly looks at the tree as though the scraggy stump holds the mystery of resurrection, the twice-born will somehow emerge from its thorny bark. Indeed, there seems to be little doubt that this tree is an earthly existence of a Divine import, to remind him constantly of the possibility of the descent of the grace.

His guru Nair promises: "Your three storeys will go high. Your leaves will have fallen on Shiva." But Pai listens to Shantha's advice, "why be so ambitious," and so decides that the vertical leap is not for him. This decision itself binds him closer to the Christian existentialism which accepts this spatiotemporal reality." Hence steps appear the Jacob's ladder—to guide his journey. Such steps constitute the most earthly form of Transfiguration. In the movement from one world to the other, we find Pai at the point of epiphany. That the vision itself is a mixture of Hindu and Christian metaphysics should not only be inevitable, but completely in keeping with the total design of reconciliation:

> I saw nose (not *the* nose) and eyes seeing eyes seeing, I saw ears curved to make sound visible, and face and limbs

rising The true Reality therefore lies in the universal, not so much as the Platonic concept, but as the form which alone is the "perfection of perfection." It is this Aristotelian revision of the Platonic concept of reality that Saint Thomas Aquinas offered as the substratum of the whole Christian theology. The very concept of reality as the scene of man's ethical action starts here and Rao's Vedantin hero clearly accepts it, although in strict non-dualism the universe of form (as well as of name) is only a phenomenon like a city seen in a mirror; or as in a dream. Thus there is probably no very logical common ground for a meeting of the two opposed modes, one declaring the Reality as Form the other as "not this, not this."

But Rao, in my opinion, approaches here to mystic faith rather than to any rigorous and intellectually viable system of Indian thought. For only in a spiritual mystique, contradictions may be dissolved. Indeed the vital function of religious symbolism is its capacity to express paradoxical situations or certain patterns of ultimate reality that can be expressed in no other way." So Pai's Christian epiphany mingles with Hindu Brahmaprapti (realization of the Absolute) for there is no personal God in this mystic communion. "I saw truth not as a fact but as ignition. I could walk into fire and be cool, I could sing and be silent." The emphasis is on the reconciliation of all opposites so that the phenomenal perspective of time, the great terror, lies at last vanquished. What a Catholic poet is assured of "Death, thou shalt die" a brahman seems to realize in life:

> I woke up and found death had passed by, telling me I had no business to be there. Then where was I? Death said, it had died. I had killed death, When you see death as death, you killed it.

If "Death is swallowed up in victory" (I Corinthians 15:34), this is precisely because the sting of sin, which for the Hindu Vedantin resides in the sense of ego, the personal self is at last removed. "I remain over, having killed myself." The obsession with self, with identity, is a proof of the bondage to time, the victory of death. So the Hindu reaches that plane where there is no death, for there is no more the illusion of ego; he has passed from non-being to being: from death to immortality. The brahman at last realizes his native heritage through accepting the Christian existence-perhaps in spite of himself.

If Rao is seen in exclusively Indian terms, then in this novel he is left with two symbols, mother cat and dream, which cannot be presented in a coherent whole of thought because these derive from mutually exclusive sub-systems of philosophy, the cat from the Southern school of modified non-dualism, and the dream from non-dualism itself. The cat indicates that the world is, the dream decrees that it is not, it is *maya*. If the world is a dream, a *maya*, how does it matter if one resigns like the kitten carried by the mother cat, or exerts individual effort clinging like a monkey cub to its mother as the rejected wife Saroja ("a tremendpus worker") does? We are indeed expected to recognize the world as dream and this can be done only through meditation and renunciation as the great Sankara illustrated in his Own life and work.

The non-dual path is through knowledge whereas the Southern school of modified dualism favours *Prapatti* or resignation to faith, How can these two exclusive traditions be synthesized in a novel, in English and why is such an attempt made at all? The urge for such reconciliation does not arise from an academic interest, but from Rao's own encounter with Western civilization which accepts the reality of the existence. In other words, his adoption of the cat symbol and the particular variant of an Indian philosophical subgenre is a means to absorb the ethical essence of Christianity the compassion for the other and gratuitous grace. Seen in this perspective his selection of the Cat school *marjaranyaya* is eminently justifiable, for many Indian philosophers trace in this particular subgenre a recognizable impact of Christianity.

Indeed, ,the whole background of *The Cat and Shakespeare* is homogeneous only in so far as it is Western, for the *house, tree, garden* and the *cat,* a domestic animal can be understood as elements in a harmonious design which is fundamentally Christian. If we accept Rao's implicit notion of the world as an equation of *maya* or *vyavahara* of non-dualism and the Platonic illusion, then the whole Western movement of a metaphysical approach to reality is harmonized, for the neoplatonic modification of the universal as form connects Christianity with Plato and saves the Hindu Raja Rao from a laceration of being. Hence the cat is presented to Nair by John, a Christian. Rao himself regards Plato "a companion of all pilgrimages," and admits that through St. Thomas Aquinas he arrives at the Gangotri, the origin of the holy Ganga.

It is therefore natural that for the existential portion of the novel, Rao has a strong Christian tradition to embed his symbols like *house, tree* and *garden* in. But for his Hindu aspiration he has to offer a private set of symbols which are originally derived from the representational mode for they lack the sanction of tradition. He wishes to indicate the non-dual concept of the phenomenality of this world through an image which has the principle of relativity translated in perception-the ration shop ruled by the great scales. This human world, being relative, is subjected to evaluation, to moral judgement according to our action which, again is our *karma* predestined from previous births. At a ration shop everybody gets his quota according to the colour of his card, the world offers everyone rewards and punishment according to one's *karma*, the ration apportioned in this earth. So "we all live on ration," and "life is a ration shop." The scale weighs everything according to the ration card, "Where is your card, Sir? Green, red or blue?" The symbol is vivid and catching no doubt, but cannot be taken as a "pure" symbol, for it is rooted in the immediate historical and semantic context, it has no permanent religious sanction of the kind *house, tree, steps* or *garden* are invested with.

There is thus a sharp qualitative difference between the two sets of symbols, religious and private. So in establishing a relation between Pai's house that is a tabernacle and the ration shop that is so secular, Rao has to bring in another private symbol, *Shakespeare*. Clinging to the dramatic situation of Hamlet's to-be or not-to-be, Rao infuses ontology into what Shakespeare perhaps meant only as an expression of indecision at a particular moment of the hero's crisis, and presents the Kingdom of Denmark as a ration shop that is the replica of this world of relativity. For Rao, Shakespear being perhaps the creator is beyond duality.' So Govindan Nair, the guru, is full of Shakespeare, and holds his sway over both the ration shop-office complex and Pai's house-wall-tree. In fact, Shakespeare as a symbol of non-duality is rooted in an associative process; didn't the Bard take his farewell in those famous words: "We are such stuff/As dreams are made on and our little life/ is rounded with a sleep"? So Rao's Trivandrum, the microcosm of the! universe, is "like a place you live in your sleep" as it is also "the city of enlightenment. "This kind of reconciliation finds waking and sleeping not as opposed modes but alternate events truly interchangeable like Andre Breton's two communicating vessels—so much so that Pai returns from the garden into the house and goes on with his normal life here, on this plane of mundane reality, unlike the predecessor Ramaswamy who is lost in the height ("I will not return").

This harmony of opposites can be offered only by a mystic faith through expression in art, not in a codified rational philosophy. *Shakespeare* is Rao's vehicle for non-duality and as such to the readers who are prepared to accept a private symbol, presents the victory of the artist over the metaphysician. The quest of Raja Rao, an Indian writer in English, ends in a comedy, in an act of reconciliation, and as such the title *The Cat and Shakespeare* is justified, because it offers a concentrated mystique of the personal faith of an artist astride two cultures. It is a deeply personal correlative for the meeting of opposites, striving towards an objective formulation: I hear the clock chime at night from my house. Thus I live a bit of eternity.

Towards the Poetics Anti-novel

In the theme of *The Cat and Shakespeare* we have seen how urgent the need is for a reconciliation of antithetical views, of "to-be or not to-be." Such antipodal points in human experience can coexist-as we have already stated-only in a subjective structure of imagination sustained by a mystic faith, but not in the rigorous rationale of an intellectually consistent system. The literary form in which such a theme may find its habitation has to disregard the logical mode of narrative development, the cause and effect relation-the basis on which rests the traditional realistic novel. The conventional novel starts with the data of a few selected items, from our experience which through evolution leads to the conclusion as a chain of cause and effect, building up an interaction of plot and character in a linear progressive development. In *The Cat and Shakespeare* on the other hand the form extends we cannot say it progresses-through a series of "happenings" which happen as "non-happenings," gratuitous encounters juxtaposed by chance."

Thus Govindan Nair goes to consult a child specialist ostensibly for his sick son Shridhar, and is found philosophizing before a young whore. That this meeting is nothing but casual is only one aspect of the maner. In the details of description of the girl and Nair's action, this episode strongly resembles the story he later writes in jail, about his boss's extra-marital affair, which, to complicate the issue further, "came true as he wrote it" The question is: what is the relation between the episode presumably happening earlier with the fiction-that-is-real which comes later? Past, present and future are all mixed up and the lack of linearity confounds fiction with reality, leaving the reader in total uncertainty as to what precisely happens and when, if anything happens at all. This episode may be seen as an example of the microstructure of the novel, which reflects the macrostructure of the whole in its mysterious dynamics of interaction in the relationship between Pai and Nair. Indeed between Pai's placid life with Shantha-not strictly unconventional in Kerala's typical brahman-nair tangle-and the adventures of his roguish neighbour Govindan Nair, there seems hardly any logical interaction.

How does Nair's arrest logically lead to Pai's salvation in the garden? Here is an insurance of the more modem form sometimes associated with the anti-novel which in spatial terms may be found circular, concentric or even mosaic. Against such a developing tradition, the structure of *The Cat and Shakespeare* may be perceived as a whole which consists of a non-logical transformation in the relationship of the characters, Ramakrishna Pai and Govindan Nair. From the very beginning, Pai is cast in the role of an object. Things happen "to him, he is affected by them just as the British bubos find his body an easy prey. Govindan Nair appears as the agent, the active character, the subject, who fetches some strong evil-smelling native medicine to drive out the British bubo. It is he who always talks about Vedanta, schemes how to acquire a house, leaps this side or that side of the barrier of the wall. Pai is always at the receiving end of his efforts. Indeed, if Nair is very much a nominative, Pai seems destined to be the accusative.

Yet at the end it is in his vision that the manifestation of the Supreme takes place, his mode of life the novel sets as its resolution. Clearly he is to be an agent, a subject. The arrest and trial of Nair constitute the watershed demarcating the two roles of Pai, objective and subjective, the one with which he begins, the other with which he ends. Out of the absurd imprisonment of Nair emerges the new role of Pai as agent, for he takes charge of the cat and he succeeds in reaching his goal.

As soon as this happens, Nair is withdrawn from the fictional reality, for it is clear that, though an agent in action, his purpose is to be instrumental in the story of Pai's salvation. We now realize that the role of Nair is actually equivocal, for, although he is presented as an aggressively active and philosophizing rascal, all his efforts are directed, not towards himself, but to facilitate Pai's journey across the wall. As Pai admits, he would never have gone to the other side of reality but for Govindan Nair who finally transpires to be an instrument. If one applies a grammatical analogy one may sum up the structure of *The Cat and Shakespeare* as an exercise in the passive voice with a long subordinate because in the active, crystallized in a core sentence like the following: Ramakrishna Pai is led to his salvation by his neighbour Govindan Nair who plays the role of guru and ultimately proves the efficacy of his teaching in the life of his disciple.

This structure is created with the help of a mixed form—narration and intellectual digression. In the previous novels the components of the mixed modes are constantly at conflict with each other, one questioning the other, in one case resulting in violent disjunction, and in acute ambivalence in the other. Further the function of intellection in *The Serpent and the Rope* is roman-tic, raising the shabby reality .of a hackneyed triangular love defamiliarizing it with high-pitched intellectual discussions and a crowd of mythical parallels. In *The Cat and Shakespeare*, the intellectual analysis without the sharpness of an invisible encounter, assumes a more meditative and mystic aspect, and what is of primary importance, it offers a perennial source of humour which is perhaps the characteristic mark of this novel.

This leads to a mixture of the sublime and the grotesque as the fundamental operative principle to effect which the novelist has to adopt a unique technique from surrealism. By "surreal" one need not be confined to the much publicized paraphernalia of early surrealism like automatism, dream-transcription, mediumistic trance and certain spectacular exhibitionist oddities in behaviour. The surreal in *The Cat and Shakespeare* resides in the consistent denial of rationality with the help of intelligent digression manifested in a special kind of humour' which alone sustains the structure, operating in symbols from disparate sources which are held firmly in cohesion. It is to be noted that critics are usually baffled or annoyed with Rao's humour in this novel and even his admirers fail to account for it in the total design." Yet humour is as pervasive in *The Cat and Shakespeare* as melancholy is in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Indeed it is the very antipode of its predecessor in which everything is enveloped with sorrow-marriage, childbirth and of course death. In *The Cat and Shakespeare* on the other hand, everything is an object of gentle laughter, not the vindictive satiric demonism, but the quiet humour which indicates distance as well as involvement.

Everything is subject for a joke, whether it is a disgusting disease like an attack of bubos, or the pathetic death of a child, not to speak of the arrest and trial which assume an absurd dimension as Govindan Nair spins a "hen-and-heifer story" about his pious brahman boss's fondness for women, while the judge goes round and round his table in search of truth. The humour here almost always tends to arise out of what is normally regarded as painful for human beings-death, disease or conflict with the law. In each instance, it is the function of the humour to absorb the content of human suffering, and present it as a form of universal divested of the individual and the particular which is the human condition. The death of Shridhar, Govindan Nair's son, is presented thus:

> The bamboos were already in the courtyard. Death had come. It spoiled a nice courtyard, with flower beds of roses. I never went across the wall. How could I? I could hear Tangamma weep, then, Govindan Nair said something. Dr. N.C. Pillai is such an able man. He walked out of the house efficiently. It was a bad case, he said. His Gladstone

> bag was so knowledgeable. It contained mysterious instruments that spoke. Death is such speech?

The immediate situation in which Shridhar's young life of seven years is consecrated to flames is completely distanced through the help of humour that pays a disproportionate attention to the spoiling of the courtyard and the pretension of the doctor which seems to have spread to his Gladstone bag-all these details tend to deflate the human sorrow by introducing inconsequential diversion. A later reference to Shridhar's death effectively ejects the issue out of the human feeling of pain: "That is why Shridhar died. Usha spoke over the wall and the cat carried him away. Funny, Sir, that a child is carried away by a cat." This "funny" aspect arises, not from the narrative of a human life but from a constant intellectual frame of reference in which death may be seen as untrue or unreal.

This framework is supplied by Rao's metaphysics which takes the human situation completely under control. Thus the description of Shridhar's death is followed by a dialogue between Pai and Usha, on generalities like life, death, marriage, in which the father teaches the daughter the Vedantic truth that real life is "where no flames can bum," beyond this phenomenal existence. This is the narrative pattern characteristic of *The Cat and Shakespeare* in which a human situation in fictional reality is presented and immediately rendered unreal through humorous ilistanciation based on a witty play with metaphysics. In fact, Shakespeare's to-be or not-to-be supplies the principle of organization of narrative and meditative components and the function of the latter is to modify the former by prolonging the creative process, by lengthening the form.

This distanciation through humour deriving from philosophy can be better appreciated if seen as a deviation, a fore grounded device against Rao's whole previous work in which human suffering and his metaphysics clash so violently.

In *The Serpent and the Rope,* the agony of Ramaswamy and Madeleine is presented within the serious and tragic formulae of the traditional-modern form of the novel which conflicts at sensitive points with Rao's metaphysics that rejects suffering as the proof of dualism, of the independent existence of the world which in his view cannot be real.

The only way to escape from the impasse, suggests *The Cat and Shakespeare,* is to treat suffering itself as unreal and it seems that only a special brand of humour can shake the irrevocable reality of human misery. So Rao's humour is of that particular variety which Andre Breton following Freud defines as a process permitting "to refuse to admit that the trauma of the external world can touch one." But the rational response to the physical suffering of bubo, the death of a son, the ignominy of a charge of corruption cannot but be fraught with pain. To break the inextricable bond with rationality Rao utilizes a higher intelligence that the surrealists term as distinterested play of thought which enables humour to channel the desired liberation." Pai's unconscious body covered with dreadful eruptions, laden with pus, is an object of laughter when Shridhar mistakes it for death, because his father finds in it an opportunity to play with the concept of reality as true awakening:

> where were you, brother, when Shridhar thought you were dead? Were you dead to yourself, my friend? You purge to live. You sleep to die. When sleep is life, where is death? Ha, ha, ha.

Here is what Breton would characterize as a typical element of *humour noir-the* comic as the subline." This grave tomfoolery stems from intelligence which in the form of play of thought per-forms a surreal function, that of breaking down the barrier erected by rationality between the two states, conscious and unconscious-to-be and not-to-be-representing different realities. This play releases humour by distancing the immediate concern of pain. Moreover, a relationship is established between a concept of Vedanta ("sleep is life") and Pai's diseased body which would be denied by a rational philosopher, but may be found acceptable as bizarre, as grotesque through the operation of humour. In other words, metaphysics becomes a structural component through humour in a surreal technique."

Not only humour, but the very extension of the narrative itself is propelled with the help of a surreal emphasis on irrationality. The basic condition of form that it may have a coherence is centred on the satisfaction of the reader's anticipation aroused in the beginning of the novel, and *The Cat and Shakespeare* fully satisfies this requirement. Pai desires to receive grace—like the absent-minded hunter who throwing leaves on the sunken image of Shiva becomes blessed with the manifestation of the Lord himself. This desire is fulfilled not by rational and traditional character development in accord with the realistic formula, but by allowing the marvellous, the fabular, to dominate." Pai's house, like the typical surreal retreat, is a privileged locale where everything is possible, the wishful fantasy is real, a cat can take man to the Beatitude. The motif of the kitten being carried by the mother cat is introduced as a metaphor of complete resignation and through constant repetition becomes the central symbol.

Then the mother cat appears in flesh and blood and proceeds to prove the validity of Govindan Nair's philosophy by practice, frees Nair from prison and leads Pai to the garden. The technique here is distinctly surreal in the extension of reality where symbol ceases to remain a symbol. So the vision of Pai is mystic and marvellous in nature, and refuses to be rationally analyzed according to one particular system. What Pai is blessed with is not the Vedantic wisdom ("Jnanam is India," as Ramaswamy has held) but an illumination. The technique registers a revolt against rationality to reach this goal through a confluence of humour and intelligence that transforms the material circumstances of an average clerk in a banal extramarital alliance, living on the generosity of an unscrupulous friend, into an allegory of salvation, a metaphysical comedy.

To allow the surreal technique to operate, other components in the structure undergo transformation. Since a denial of rationality is a blow at the very form of the traditional novel, in *The Cat and Shakespeare* we find a caricature of the compositional principle of the novel. Take for example the triangular plotting which is the most convenient peg for a Western author to hang his story on. In *The Cat and Shakespeare*, the triangle consists of Ramakrishna Pai, his mistress Shantha who is in reality as domesticated as a conventional wife, and his neighbour Govindan Nair who is a combination of a guru and a rogue, and as such the whole plan thoroughly upsets the romantic tradition of extramarital passion which serves as a theme in several novels including Roo's *The Serpent and the Rope*.

Of course Shantha is not married to Pai, but the complications in the plot do not arise out of Pai's love for his mistress Shantha and aversion to wife Saroja. Her relation with Pai is a caricature of the grand romantic passion patterned by the Tristan-Iseult legend—the very prototype of the man-woman encounter in the fictional tradition, because she has become the mistress of Pai not from a passionate love for an individual man or for his particular qualities, but from the admiration for Govindan Nair's philosophizing. It is because Nair's son Shridhar dies, that she comes to live with Pai. She looks after the cat for the animal belongs to Nair. Although she is still the Other, a residue of the existential role of woman in *The Serpent and the Rope*, she is not wholly an object here. Unlike Savithri, Rao's grand formula of Indian womanhood, Shantha, is never seen as a docile disciple of Pai in an asexual role. Indeed, she seems to understand Nair's riddles better than Pai and hence has a semblance of individual independence. It is she who repeats Yag-navalkya's exposition of the Self (which was done by Ramaswamy in *The Serpent and the Rope)* and befuddles Pai showing that she proves his existence ("only I say you. And you say I"). Unlike his proud predecessor, Pai readily admits his own limitation and finds her equivocation ("she always says two things at the same time") nearer to Govindan Nair's roundabout way of talking. So, like Madeleine, she has an independent profession as a teacher, the responsibility of a family to think about (her widowed mother and brother, not to speak of the landed property). As Madeleine "had never touched anyone," Shantha too has "never touched any man before," and stands in sharp contrast to Savithri's coquetry. So Madeleine's dead son Krishna Pierre is momentarily resurrected in Shantha's lovely child, Krishna.

At the same time, Shantha is not a three-dimensional character who inhabits a fictional reality in flesh and blood which Madeleine does in her tragic rejection. This is because Shantha is presented completely on the surface, more of a Platonic universal of womanhood than a particular woman. She "is not a woman, she is woman," as the narrator states. This recalls Ramaswamy's journey to Plato proving "Georges is not Georges-Georges is man," But in the preceding novel, this is only a temporary intellectual victory for Ramaswamy, since throughout the novel Georges is presented as an individual typical no doubt' of the tormented Slav emigre, but at the same time a particular person enclosed by time, with his battered arm and Catholic fervour. The reality of *The Serpent and the Rope* is peopled by characters very much like Georges, who are individuals as well as types, but never pure abstract universals.

Most of them bear the distinguishing traits of character in a traditional novel, what Iris Murdoch would describe as "a dynamic merging of the idea of a person with the idea of class," In Shantha we find no such depth in which different layers coexist. She is sufficient entirely on the surface, "I am no Panchali or Damayanthi. I am just a woman. Lord, may I just be woman." She is almost a one-dimension character, the illustration of womanhood as form, she is not representative of a class. In other words the very principle of characterization is laid bare by extolling her as form and denying her individual roundness in concrete situations. Her function is to feed the cat which eventually takes Pai across this existence. It is never clear if she herself has achieved any spiritual goal or if she longs for it.

She seems to be sufficient by herself, playing with the house-building. At best, she is close to being a mediatrix, but she never represents the independent Feminine Principle or *sakti* to be worshipped as such." Since she is an illustration of an abstraction, she may not excite the hero into an obsessive desire for dominance which marks the arrogant Ramaswamy's relation with women. Besides, Pai too is reduced to the bare essentials of manhood, without the romantic idealized content of his predecessor—he is "just a man." He is not so much a modern anti-hero as the illustration of abstract manhood, for he seems to leave no background, no parents, no country, no relatives, so very unlike his predecessor Ramaswamy. We know more about his wife Saroja, presented only in glimpses, than the milieu in which Pai may be embedded. His only claim at being the hero of the novel is the fact that when Shantha goes to the Revenue Office with her problem about her land and Pai stands against the filing ladder, she knows him immediately "to be her man." If she has decided to worship him, it is from the natural order of things in the world and has nothing to do with Pai's qualities. This presents a caricature of the love-at-first-sight convention and also of the in-tensely personal love with spiritual pretensions, both of which are followed in *The Serpent and the Rope.*

If Pai is a subject in relation to Shantha, he is clearly an object in relation to Govindan Nair, a guru-cum-rogue who builds his disciple a house, explains Brahman to the brahman and of course provides him with the mother cat. In fact it is this unusual combination that enables him to take care of Pai's two worlds, the here and the hereafter. It is this mixture of irreverence and the sublime that marks the satire on the conventional preceptor, the grave father figure whose glimpse we caught for a moment in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Moreover, the very presentation of a character consistently from outside points towards the technique of the anti-novel. Although a lot of things happen which normally should cause great internal disturbance—the premature death of a child, imprisonment and trial-we have little knowledge of what goes on in his devious mind. Like Shantha, he also exists strictly on the surface, as though the author admits the impenetrability of characters in his own fictional creation. Since the presentation of psychology led to a problematic of narrative technique in delving the souls of Ramaswamy and Savithri, here the author seems to abjure the omniscience of the creator, and evades the authorial responsibility altogether.

To try to understand them with reference to actual situations pertaining to social and phenomenal reality, as some critics have done and reached a state of exasperation, is fundamentally a wrong approach, because in this novel, it is not authenticity that is sought for in those fictional personages, but an intensity which links them to their creator, not to the external reality. Like surreal characters they have a function similar to that of a lightning conductor. A minimum of particularities seem adequate to de-fine them because they are embodiments of desire and personify the aspirations of their creator.' Although we know so little about Pai, Nair or Shantha, none of their actions, nor their behaviour in any of the situations they happen to be placed in, surprise us. In other words they seem to fulfil Andre Breton's hope, acting "in an altogether foreseeable way in view of an unforeseen result."

The absence of interiorization which explains motivation and supplies justification, indicates a rejection of psychology, which is however a part of the larger revolt against logic, the main prop of the novel form. It is the assumption of a stable logical relationship between cause and effect that constitutes the very basis of the hypothetical reality of fiction. 'As we have seen, *The Cat and Shakespeare* does fulfil the expectation aroused in the beginning, not as a causal progress through character development, but through the operation of the marvellous, through the denial of commonsense rationality. This principle itself is built into the work to show the actual rejection of logic in the process of composition. When Shridhar is fatally ill, his father Govindan Nair's obsession with non-logic takes precedence over his paternal concern to play with the idea of the cause of Shridhar's illness "Since you want a cause, anything is the cause. The more innocent a thing, the more mysterious its cause"—and concludes, "Usha is the cause of Shridhar's illness."

Apart from the obvious satire at causality revealing the technique of the novel which is "a system of no logic, and that is the story"—the passage is a pointer in the direction of the new fiction in which the novelist-at-work is to be exposed." In the little pastiche, the mock-Hamlet scene which may have irritated readers accustomed to traditional-modernist fiction, the organizing principle of the novel is intentionally exposed to the reader. It attracts attention to the fictionality of the fiction, as Hamlet's play-within- the play is to function "tropically," "to hold, as' there, the mirror up to nature," and suggest the innermost meaning through characters as symbols. We know from the pastiche that the fictional world that has been created is an artifact which imitates the relative nature of our reality. An action committed in the play (as the murder of Polonius) is like a killing done in dream.

So the mother cat with the full impunity of Vedantic *maya* kills Bhoothalinga Iyer because the death of the boss is necessary in the novel. A live Bhoothalinga Iyer would have been a real nuisance in the trial of Nair, especially in effecting the miracle of his signature, not to speak of the "sheer pornography" that Nair ladles out' on the pretext of giving an account of his boss's promiscuous habits. It is through the Shakespearean interlude that we are prepared to take the whole fictional world as a piece of fiction whose purpose is "tropical," to illustrate an abstract idea of phenomenality, a relative world beyond which lies the Absolute Reality. So the title is not a mere surrealist stunt, but a pointer to the new technique that the novel has adopted in its post-modernist leaning towards the anti-novel. As a novelist, Rao' seems to have solved for once the problems that he has confronted in his attempt to adopt the traditional representational mode of the novel by evolving a symbolic variant of the anti-novel that draws his experience and his view of life into a harmony." If the organic wholeness of a work of art has any bearing on an inter-cultural encounter, the utilization of sophisticated Western poetics in "a tale of modern India" points towards a desperate artistic attempt to bridge the rift in the very self of the brahman novelist astride two modes, the archaic and the modem.

The Break-through: A Zero Degree Writing

"A new form appears not in order to express a new content," writes Victor Shklovsky, "but in order to replace an old form, which has already lost its artistic value. ".. In our analysis of the narrative form of *The Cat and Shakespeare* we have noticed the replacement of traditional-modernist realism by an illustrative, symbolic form effected by a technique which is associated with surrealism and as such anticipates the anti-novel. It is therefore our task to see how the form is actually realized in style, for it is the use of language that constitutes the final test, especially in the type of fiction to which Rao seems to direct his talence fiction in which the narrative is gradually foreshortened to emphasize an alternative aesthetic.

The language of *The Cat and Shakespeare* has not attracted much critical attention presumably for its simplicity and lack of that luxuriant and heavy rhetoric which characterize Rao's earlier works. However, it is this apparent simplicity, the restricted and severely mundane vocabulary, the acceptance of the normal state of the English language that by itself constitutes the aesthetic device, for it is to be seen as a deviance foregrounded against Rao's previous works which set the standard. In other words, by the time Rao comes to write his third novel, his stylistic inventiveness has become more or less automatized. His rhetorical manipulation of elegant inversion, antitheses, parallelism, archaic flavour, has become so habitual that he seems to have developed a highly idiosyncratic, personal standard of normal language.

In *The Cat and Shakespeare,* it is against his own standard language that the de-automatization has to proceed, for without de-automatization, the drawing away of the veil of habituality, the aesthetic use of language is hardly possible. This explains an interesting arid perhaps paradoxical fact—that in *The Cat and Shakespeare* linguistic form holds the narrative structure in cohesion, since story has undergone diminution, and at the same time there is no obvious, immediately striking experiment in verbal art, something that marks his other works. At every level, vocabulary, syntax and imagery, we find an operation of the principle of con-traction rather than of expansion, because it is meant to de-automatize the standard already set by his own baroque expansion and luxuriant inventiveness.

In *Kanthapura* the mingling of colloquial speech with literary devices of rhetoric bears the stamp of the traditional, realistic and modem form whose very essence, according to Eric Auerbach, lies in the mixture of high and low. Its sophisticated development in *The Serpent and the Rope* emphasizes that minute craftsmanship which constitutes the very equipment of the realistic mode, characterized by Roland Barthes as "a combination of the formal signs of literature (preterite, indirect speech, the rhythm of written language) and of the no less formal signs of realism (incongruous snippets of popular speech, strong language or dialect words etc.)." In the careful use of rhetorical devices, the style of *The Serpent and the Rope* hovers on preciosity in its syntactic manoeuvres and artificial stretching of the vocabulary, not to speak of the conscious craftsmanship evident in the imagery. Its very eclecticism ties it to history, to Time which is for the Vedantin in Rao, only phenomenal. His eloquent inversions, memorable antitheses and stimulating epigrams may, from a certain point of view, be considered as spectacular signs of the fabrication which the traditional form of novel invariably demands. So a mutation in form must be accompanied by a drastic change in language. Consider the opening lines of *The Cat and Shakespeare:*

> I have a small white house here, with a courtyard from the back I look over coconut trees, and huts, and somewhere there's the sound of the sea. I was appointed a divisional clerk, Trivan, drum, some two years ago. I left my wife and two children at Pattanur. My eldest was five years of age, my youngest three. It's not easy to change schools, you know, and then it was monsoon time.

This is fundamentally a different use of language from the stylization evident in Rao's other works. *Kanthapura,* as we have found in the first chapter,' starts with an inversion for emphasis ("*Kanthapura* is its name"), goes to another elaborate one ("High on the Ghats ... sugarcane"), which presents the scene in an impressionistic liveliness. This is focused further throughout the passage with repetition, alliteration and conventional poetic diction, specific defamiliarization for effectiveness using rhetorical figures. In *The Serpent and the Rope* the exploitation of literary tradition is even more elaborate as well as subtle in the opening paragraph, replete with irony, rhetorical interrogations, paradoxes, unusual placing of attributes:

> I was born a Brahmin-that is *devoted to Truth and all that*... But how many of my ancestors since the excellent Yagnyavalkya, my legendary and Upanishadic ancestor, have really known the Truth excepting the sage Madhava, who founded an

> empire or, rather, helped to build an empire, and wrote some of the most profound of Vedantic texts since Shri Sankara' There were others, *so I'm told,* who left *hearth and riverside fields,* and wandered to *mountains distant* and hermitages "to see God face to face." And some of them did see God face to face and built temples. But when they died, for indeed'- they did "die"-they too *must have been* burnt by tank or grove or meeting of two rivers, and they too *must have* known they did not die.

The aim of such concentration of heavy rhetoric is a serious representation of fictional reality as a solid world entirely plausible in its particular emphasis on romantic idealization whereas in the first work the stress was on a poetic distance approximating to the legendary.

In contrast to this seriousness in fictional representation, the language of *The Cat and Shakespeare* does not seem to use the traditional tools of literariness so customary in building up fictive reality. We may find in its very simplicity, without colloquial snippets or literary manipulation of artifice,' a tendency towards a neutral style, since it does not utilize these conventional opposites-either of the language of everyday speech or that of literariness. A passage like the following may indeed be felt to possess what Roland Barthes would call an "amodal form" of indicative mood or of the "zero degree writing."

> Shantha lives with her mother and two brothers round near the Poolimmod. The brothers go to school. The mother cooks. Shantha earns (they have some property too, in North Travancore). Shantha also loves. Her house is not far. Only in the monsoon are the roads very difficult. Even so we somehow manage with each other.

The unusual brevity of construction, reminds, one almost of the first lessons in a children's language primer. The effect is an intentional dissociation from the literary convention of the traditional novel form which has so far been Rao's own as well. In the preceding work, Rao strives to find his own style by enhancing the existing mode with the help of customary weapons-archaism, conceits, purple patches—usually quoted by his admirers-which merely led to the same kind of solidity erected by craftsmanship that one finds, for example, in Andre Gide 'or Oscar Wilde. Here his intention is primarily to break through his own wall of art. It is therefore significant that the residue of *The Serpent and the Rope* is often utilized almost as a satire on its own literariness.

Take for example the inversion in the passage just quoted which in contrast to the similar constructions in *The Serpent and the Rope* meant to be so elegant and serious, here emphasizes the mundane reality of the mud and slush of monsoon. In fact the few inversions that occur in this novel are mostly satiric in extending rhetorical elegance to the very prosaic. Take other examples like "Invisible are the ways of Destiny," to explain Shridhar's French 'leave from school to carry Pai's food; or "Notorious are the Nairs for the mess they live in," which needs no explanation. Even in 'wonderful is man" gravity is not the focus, since it is followed by "he needs to be told he is" as an elaboration, and so seems facetious on the face of it. One of the few instances where inversion performs the customary function 'of rhetoric—as we find amply in the other two novels-is in the single note of sadness from Shantha ("white is the foam" since it sings of "despair"), which affects by sheer proximity the succeeding description of Nair: "Like a pirate on the high seas is Govindan Nair"; the other is "form was it," conveying the spiritual essence of Pai's enlightenment with an aesthetic finality.

The studied simplicity of construction which so pointedly avoids the usual rhetoric of deviation and foregrounding that characterize Rao's preceding works may be perceived no less in the careful restraint on the vocabulary. One may apparently find the vocabulary marked by a negative treatment. The words which are repeated are ordinary *nouns—sea, tree, house, cat, kitten. wall—and* common verbs like *be, have, sleep, awake, love, build, live, weigh* etc. The emphasis on monosyllables by itself is a refusal to enter into elaborate literariness which the lengthy words in *The Serpent and the Rope* so often suggest. One is immediately reminded of the surreal practice of emphasizing common verbs." More important however is the inextricable connection of the repetition of these very words with the symbolism of the whole novel.

Yet all these words belong to the daily humdrum life of man anywhere on this earth. None of them primarily connotes any abstract idea. Yet through the device of repetition these often reveal a symbolic value which is embedded in the whole narrative structure. In other words, in this novel the unusual currency of the common items is to be regarded as aesthetically motivated to control the whole design. If each of these has double referents, these seem to be guided, at least the majority of them, as much by personal predilection as by Christian and Vedantin background. Each is fully accounted for in the whole narrative of Ramkrishna Pai as the illustration of an idea so much so that it is perhaps not possible to distinguish the two forms, linguistic and narrative, as independent elements. Indeed one may even say, that in *The Cat and Shakespeare,* style is the form. Take for example the conscious persistence of the word *house* for which the substitute *home* is never used: This selection is a proof that the house of Pai is only the earthly existence, a tabernacle, not his true *home* which is one with the Lord Himself; or the repetition of *dream* related to the non-dual concept of the empirical existence—a product of *maya* which is like a dream, the Absolute being the Supreme Reality.

For the surrealist incidentally, it is the state of dream that constitutes "the superior reality" so in Rao's use of the word "dream" as a symbolic motif of this empirical existence, we find therefore a foregrounding of the "Indian" intellectual content as a contrast against the background of the literary association of the word that surrealism has brought in vogue.

However, the aesthetically-oriented deviance which happens to be perhaps the only noticeable departure from the norms of standard English, is a particular syntactic pattern which lays bare the compositional principle of Rao's allegorical mode, namely, a fusion of the particular with the universal: "And Shantha is not just a woman, she is woman". "She (Usha) is my child. She is not merely that. She is child." It is by the simple omission of the particularizing article (or possessive adjective/pronoun) that Rao suggests the symbolic universal nature of the individual characters who therefore inhabit a fictional world which is not imitative of contingency but illustrative of the true Reality. Indeed, the subtlety of the device may appear concealed unless we compare the French rendering: "Shantha est pas simplement une femme, elle est la femme," "elle est mon enfant, mais elle, n'est pas simplement cela, elle est l'enfant."

In the French version, the particular and the universal are distinguished by antithesis, between *une* and *la, mon* and *la:* this construction by the virtue of the distinction seems to retain, as though, an implied opposition. But in the original English, the absence of the definite article and the possessive by itself presents, so to say, the universal concretely, withdrawing the emphasis on the difference. This may be seen as the linguistic embodiment of the metaphysic of the Universal as Form." Of course the meaning does not change fundamentally in the French version but the fine shade of Rao's significance which lies in the embodiment of a complete identity between the particular (Shantha, Usha) and the universal (woman, child) is perhaps missed. In English it is embedded in the syntax. So the construction becomes clearly an intentional foregrounding in "I am cause." In the epiphany it is pointedly emphasized, "I saw nose (not *the* nose)."

The last instance decidedly establishes the author's conscious deviation. It is interesting that in the French translation these two sentences have literal rendering, "je suis cause" and "je vis nez (non *le* nez)" and are therefore closer to the original, though the pattern is indistinct in French because in the other two instances the definite article *(Ia)* has been used. In Rao's English, on the other hand, the omission of the article constitutes by its uniform absence in specific occasions of Platonic overtones, a crucial structural image which has a dual function. It indicates the Platonic background as well as the whole allegorical mode of the novel in which the particular story of Ramkrishna Pai reflects the universal human condition.

This fundamental concept of identity leads to an expert mingling of tenses in the novel. In the preceding work, the use of the present tense seems to have been concerned solely with generic truths and universal abstractions whereas the fictional world of Ramaswamy-Madeleine-Savithri carried on in the past tense, the conventional narrative preterite. So it has appeared as though the fictional reality built on the past tense is being constantly punctured by authorial intrusion in the form of the present tense. The demarcation between past and present seems to emphasize the distinction between the particular human life presented as fiction and the universal idea which is a general truth. The tension that is generated from such continual opposition is to a great extent resolved in *The Cat and Shakespeare.* There are doubtless plenty of abstract generalizations that are cast in the present as we find in such random instances: "What is a doctor? One who knows diseases is the simplest definition." "Knowledge alone knows." "Malabar is' truth."

What lends special value to the use of the present tense in this novel is its considerable extension to build up the fictional world which in the conventional novel, as in Rao's own previous work, is carried on in the past. The traditional form of the novel is inextricably bound to the past tense as a curious convention of fictionality. Roland Barthes has therefore, called the preterite "the comer-stone of Narration" for "it signifies a creation" "the presence of Art." So, Rao's frequent use of the present tense in the narration of the events happening in a fictional reality may be seen as a decisive breakaway from the traditional. Compare, for example, the introduction of Shantha in the present simple with that of Madeleine in the conventional past. One may find in it the fusion of theme and language, for Shantha's being a universal is embodied in the language itself as the' present tense is often the indicator of generic truths, whereas Madeleine is an individual, particular character cast in the past which denotes fictionality.

Since the use of the past tense suggests a solid and separate world which the readers accept suspending disbelief, its repeated substitution by the present disturbs the conventional reality which now becomes fluid and extends in a surreal manner. So not only are states, conditions and descriptions in the present, but also innumerable actions that are cast not in the fictional reality of the past but outside the assurance of this solidity:

1. Shantha is carrying four months.
2. There are very few interesting faces in the ration shop.
3. Tangamma sends Shridhar with some coffee to console me. Then Govindan Nair . . . jumps across the wall.
4. The doctor knows the temperature is measured with a glass instrument that speaks, Modhu . . . cleans the thermometer and the temperature has gone up to 105 degrees.
5. Mother cat sits in a cage between the office table and the almirah.

This use of the present tense has another very important function in describing actions to indicate the dream nature of the sensible world, for the use of the present tense is often associated with dream in literature. So the extension of reality may be conveyed, as it is actually done in some of the French nouveaux romans by banishing the past tense which is associated with the literary convention of a narrow and fixed reality. This also explains why in *Kanthapura* Rao's switchover to the present tense in all violent actions happening in a realistic presentation registers collapse of technique because Rao's form was geared to the traditional. In *The Cat and Shakespeare* on the other hand the form is not realistic but symbolic and the technique is surreal successfully endowing the fictional reality with a dream-like provisional existence where "happenings" happen as "non-happenings."

Further, the present tense is also the tense of "an experience we want to make immediate for somebody" when we use it in writing." This is so because the reality is so complex that it cannot perhaps be contained or conveyed in a rigid convention of the linguistic habit of past tense. The present tense dramatizes the creative process itself. The work, instead of being presented to the reader as a product which may be examined at an aesthetic distance, calls for the participation of the reader in the process of creation itself. So the short dramatic interlude, a parody of *Hamlet*, is justified for it blends with the whole linguistic structure which dramatizes the composition of the novel.

When the narrator of the novel presents the fictional happenings as "now," time becomes a flux indivisible into sharply demarcated past, present and future.

This perhaps leads to the incorporation of mental attitudes logical only in the post-independent India in a fiction the action of which is supposed to take place during the Second World War. Consider the following observations as typical examples of the fluidity of time: "in the new India plans were never so difficult, the new is made with plans" "Two is the limit-but then if you have three-on forty-seven rupees, how can you feed a third child?"

British India had neither plans for development nor for population control. Rao's actual time of writing is here mixed with the fictional time which is maintained in the scales of pay his hero draws, plausible during the Second World War and not, in the sixties. This brings to our mind Mare-Chagall's surreal painting, *Time is a river without banks.*

This fluidity runs through the imagery of *The Cat and Shakespeare.* The wall, so solid and tangible *(tile-covered burging, obstreperous)* is at the same time so elusive *(will-o' -the wisp).* It IS so concrete in its blunt and shabby three-dimensional existence, at the same time an abstract, "going from nowhere to nowhere," "like the sound heard and not the word understood." Here the sensory and the spiritual, the abstract and the concrete are woven into each other whereas in the *The Serpent and the Rope* the same opposites are so violently yoked together that these are juxtaposed and the difference predominates. Indeed. It is the Imagery of *The Cat and Shakespeare* that records a synthesis of different modes, of language-literary and metaphysical in an *ecriture unique* which is the hallmark of surreal writing.

The central Image, suggested again and again, is a comparison between Govindan Nair and the cat. His preaching of the philosophy of Cat is very concretely embodied in his being almost a sort of feline figure, so that Pai in his subordination to him is a kind of kitten being carried by the mother cat. Nair is "round and tall," he continually "leaps across the wall" or "jumps across the wall," he would "open his paw" to bring out some betel leaf and tobacco. The way he massages his limbs and plays with toe-nails does indeed remind one of a cat's toilette. Above all he *"meowmews* the dictionary" as he declares: "All my language can be reduced to that-meow, meow, me-owoow." Anyone acquainted with surreal aesthetics and aware of the recurrent motif of the cat in surreal art (e.g. Leonora Carrington's *les chats)* is particularly reminded of that half-cat half-human figure of Victor Brauner's *Woman into Cat* which is at the same time so elusive and real.

It is because Nair is the mover of action as we have seen in our study of the structure, so the lion's share is given to Nair in imagery too. Since he is admittedly Pai's guru

("Govindan Nair is my guide"), the sacred tree "spreads like a holy umbrella above him," the sea being the manifestation of God's creative power, Nair is the "mighty pirate" who looks "indeed as if he had ploughed the seas." The single luxuriant piece exploiting symbolist ,devices-a residue of *The Serpent and the Rope's* symbolist imagery—compares the devious intricacies of Govindan Nair's thought to an elaborate jungle scene. It is Nair's constant jokes about the Absolute that make the surreal fusion of the sublime and the ludicrous so natural in images like "God is a ledgerkeeper" interested not in the morality of profit and loss, but in Truth- "in the correct maintenance of the accounts." Death is the "clock tower of the Secretariat, it chimes time," "like the office peon carrying a slip from some visitor to the boss, destiny brings the British bubo to Pai." In all these instances the emphasis is on the ordinary the mundane, without that elaborate literary effectiveness as the aim which dominates the previous works of Rao. Yet transcendence lurks through the chinks of banality.

It is true that in the realistic patches, presenting "a tale of modem India," there are colloquial bits, samples of "Indian" English, occasionally obvious rhetoric-like archaisms which have been noted by critics and do link the language with the style of Rao's previous work. But the point that needs emphasis is that all these traditional stylistic devices that Rao exploited to its farthest limits in previous works appear here not as foregrounded aesthetic devices but as background, and the unusually simple constructions, prevalence of common monosyllabic words, imagery from familiar fields constitute the foregrounding. In other words, in *The Cat and Shakespeare,* compared to Roo's previous works, the role of back-ground and foreground registers a complete reversal.

Besides, another marked difference from the earlier works lies in an almost rigorous subordination of the rhetoric to the structural function of symbolism so that the differences between the traditional and the subjective are carefully maintained. Thus the connection between Nair and the Cat is supported by faith whereas the relationships between death and clock, life and ration-shop, ledger-keeper and God draw from the immediate context of social and contemporary reality. In the fusion of the real and the ideal, the mundane and the sublime, the linguistic structure of *The Cat and Shakespeare* presents the very essence of an allegorical mode which in literary tradition is both symbolic and mimetic."

8

Comrade Kirillov

A Conclusion that is Not

From a detailed analysis of narrative and language, it is clear that in *The Cat and Shakespeare,* Raja Rao concludes his quest as a philosoper-novelist, having at last evolved an individual and distinctive correlative in an allegorical form which mixes representation and illustration within a surreal aesthetics. But for the reader, the experience of *The Cat and Shakespeare* may present a few disconcerting aspects because the rigorous symmetry of the structure itself will appear somewhat of a suspect. Its hermetically sealed neatness is open to the criticism of a gathering obsession with technique which leads to subordination of theme to language. One is of course free to follow a strict structuralist like Roland Barthes who has declared that content is non-existent because "subject is a level in the hierarchy of interpretation," the text being "an onion, a construction of layers, whose body contains, finally no heart, no kernel: no secret, no irreducible principle, nothing except the infinity of its own surfaces.'

Regarded as such an "onion"a construct of layers-Rao's novel may satisfy a structuralist, especially in the dominance accorded to language. But in Rao's evolution this predominance of language raises, as I have already mentioned, a peculiar paradox because, according to Roman Jakobson, the widely acknowledged guru of structuralism in literary criticism, it is "in the Realist aesthetics that the verbal art assumes dominance" and it is precisely against this very aesthetics, equating it with Western/alien tradition, that Rao's "Indian" identity has waged a lifelong crusade. As a consequence, he is forced to give' up linguistic experimentation and gradually confine himself more and more to the limited sphere of syntactic variation which in any case offers an artist much less freedom than imagery and even lexis. So the language that evolves is transparent in simplicity but at the same time possesses the concentrated layers of thought in a crystal as evident in a passage like this:

> Birth is instantaneous with time. Who is born where? Time is born in time. And that is Shantha. To be a wife is not to be wed. To be a wife is to worship your man. Then you are born. And you give birth to what is born in being born. You annihilate time and you become a wife. Wifehood, of all states in the world, seems the most holy. It stops work. It creates. It lives on even when time dies. Suppose you broke the clock, would the garden go? Suppose the garden were burned, where will the sky go? Such is woman.

It is not exactly impossible to understand the passage referring to the opposition between Time and Eternity that underlies Rao's intellectual view, to his concept of man-woman relationship, of marriage, the traditional symbolism of the garden, his personal symbol of the clock and so on. The abrupt transitions from one sentence to another can be explained as a particular stylistic feature, a continuation of the non-logical paragraph construction of *The Serpent and the Rope*, and close to the idiom of modern poetry.

We may also, if we like, appreciate the neutrality of the carefully evolved simple style dominated by monosyllables. But the problem is unless we are unusually conscious of these features all the time, we may find the language too lightweight to convey what it intends to convey, because it is loaded beyond its potential and tends to turn on itself desperately in a permanent pattern of involutes. Even if one may not expect a one-to-one correspondence, one may not be prepared to accept an allegory rooted in subjectivity alone. Consider for example, Rao's individual, highly unconventional use of the Cat symbol from a school of modified non-dualism which accepts a personal god, hence the hunter is blessed with the vision of Lord Shiva himself. But in the vision of Rao's hero there is no God; because here Rao's rigid non-dualism which denies a personal god takes over. So Pai's godless epiphany remains suspended in the void of a personal mystique.

He does not appear to have realized the non-difference between the individual and the Absolute Consciousness in an unequivocal declaration that one expects from a Vedantin for whom the reality is. "I am Brahman:' On the other hand though Pai is led to salvation by his faith, never do we get that absolute gesture of surrender to the will of a divine father, which springs from the belief that "We are of God" and "God is love". If the fundamental core of difference between the impersonal, metaphysical "India" and the ethical, poetic West of Christ which Rao himself so vehemently brought out as opposite poles in *The Serpent and the Rope,* gives in to an ordered hierarchy in *The Cat and Shakespeare,* the structure is based almost entirely on an individual apprehension of Truth.

Such an obsession with the subjective may utterly confuse a reader who may be acquainted with the Indian tradition of philosophy as well as with the Christian background of Western literature. He is condemned to a prison of language where time *must* be illusory, death *must* be unreal, the world *is* at one moment and *is not* at the next depending completely on the author's own level of interpretation. Even if the grand finale is "I remain over, having killed myself," the paradox is meaningful if only one understands the "I" as the Brahman, the "impersonal," not as the personal pronoun of the English language. The whole manoeuvre aimed at the destruction of the materialist view of the world purported to be Western, turns on itself and ultimately establishes the supremacy of the external form. One wonders if we do not find here an example of "the symbolic annulment of language by producing aberrant meanings," which is, according to Sartre, the tragedy of surreal aesthetics and leads to "the realization of nothingness by too much fullness of being."

In *The Serpent and the Rope* the language provokes reactions favourable and unfavourable. But the danger of the style in *The Cat and Shakespeare* is that it may not evoke any response at all because it tends to relinquish the function of language by a constant dislocation of relationship between the signifier and the signified. What is missing here is the deep involvement of language in a human context which marks the previous novels. Contrast the uniform, smooth and slippery exterior of *The Cat and Shakespeare* with the jagged ups and downs of *The Serpent and the Rope:*

> I composed several letters to Savithri. What could I tell her? "To him," says the Upanishads, "who is earnest, to the Atman comes the Atman. It was not land and rivers that separated us. It was Time itself. It was myself. When the becoming stopped I would wed Savithri. If the becoming stopped would there be a wedding? Where would the pandal be, where uncle Seetharamu and the elephant?

The metaphysics that underlies this passage is not fundamentally different from the conceptual base of the passage quoted from *The Cat and Shakespeare—the* relation between Time/Existence and Eternity/Atman. But the language here, as distinguished from the other, is rooted deeply in the human context, in the choice before Ramaswamy, whether he should accept the offer of Savithri. One may even point out that the realistic background of Saroja's wed-ding with the details of the setting up of a festive pandal and the invariable presence of uncle Seetharamu, the busybody that every ceremony needs, supplies the content of meaning-the dichotomy between Being and Becoming, the human longing for timelessness and the equally human bondage to time. Hence the shortest sentence by its length, so it seems, may convey the deepest anguish ("It was myself").

Even the elephant, reminiscent of the erotic frenzy described in detail earlier in the novel seems near to the human condition. The world of *The Cat and Shakespeare* appears almost totally dehumanized in comparison. If the dichotomy is attempted to be solved, the harmony that has emerged appears as unearthly as the bright, uniformly surface of the moon, so distant from the various shades that envelop the human experience and constitute the mystery that is man. The humour of Govindan Nair sounds desperate as he runs a commentary on the Vedanta to accompany Pai's scatological event even as Alfred larry's Dr. Faustroll babbles on God which his donkey Bosse-de-Nage interrupts by excremental function. If the sublime and the vulgar are fused here, the fusion is carried with a reductive rage.

This rage is directed at the very complexity of human relation-ships which is constantly sought to be negated. The three major characters, Pai, Govindan Nair and Shantha, are held together not by the personal bond of love and affection that carries the whole creation, but by a disinterested attachment which may appear paradoxical. The discontinuity from experience is indicated in the very structure of their mutual relationship-in the insistence on an unalloyed sweetness that is rather cloying. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, to jar the perfect worship of Pai by Shantha or the perfect guidance of Pai by Nair. The whole complexity of the human condition that must find a place for death, for misery, for human shortcomings, is totally evaded as in the example of Shantha's perfect motherhood:

> Usha is a grown up child, and she loves her mother, who is Shantha, for Shantha is kind, and

> will not talk of the Dutch. She who does not talk of the Dutch is Mother. So Mother is Shantha.

If Usha's own mother Saroja has used the bogey of the Dutch invaders to throw an occasional scare to her children, she joins a host of mothers of all ages and lands in her supposed contrariness. That motherhood is only affection and nothing but sweetness is an abstract concept which denies the whole experience of a mother. One cannot resist the suspicion that in this insistence on the perfection of the abstract form of motherhood devoid of the content of actual imperfection, we find the symptom of the author's inability to face the reality. His whole presentation of humanity as a form of the universal might bear as a motto a structural precept like this, "To reach reality one has first to reject experience." This denial or evasion of human experience lies at the base of Rao's mechanistic conception of causality which is satirized in the whole novel. The example that Nair the guru offers to prove the assumed absurdity of causal relation is indicative of a fundamental disjunction:

> You wear a Gandhi cap-a two-anna piece of one-foot cloth that any man can put on his pate, and not even what his irreverent bladder empties could be held in the cap's depth, such its size yet you could get arrested for anti-British activity.

Wearing a Gandhi cap results in persecution by the British Government not for any physical quality of the cap or the quantitative value of its material which Nair emphasizes, but because of its significance in the context of reality which lies in its habitual use by those engaged in the movement of Indian Independence. When Rao satirizes the cause and effect relationship in terms of the Gandhi cap as the cause and imprisonment as the result, he treats the Gandhi cap as mere physical form bereft of human content. The cap is a sign, with a semiotic function which is its theme that is totally denied by the author.' The whole attempt to break through the positivist conception of a stable reality therefore defeats itself and presents the external universe alone as the human condition. Life is defined ultimately in terms of a building construction or of the body of a woman, for, it is an existence where the only problem is the evacuating habits of a child.

The metamorphosis of appearance and reality sustains a non-human perfection of form as harmony. One worders if the price that Rao pays to arrive at a synthetic form as the resolution of a crisis of identity does not prove to be exorbitant. If literature has any insight into life or any relation to human import, it can hardly afford to be content with the vanishing shadow of man. C.D. Narasimaiah claims that Raja Rao has found in *The Cat and Shakespeare* "the most adequate concrete equivalent of a profound vision of life, which has its validity not only for the contemporary Indian situation, but for our entire fragmentary civilization." The vision is more a dream than a realization for it arises not out of life, but of an autistic consciousness which is imperial in its isolation from humanity. As Rao himself declares: "I can say that all I write is for myself." The corresponding language strives in the elaborate art of selfdestruction and questions the very function of language itself. Its validity for the "fragmentary civilization" lies in its ultimate emphasis on the depth of the fissures, in its total dissociation from human suffering. One suspects that the form itself has become a temptation and turns the literary work into a crystalline symbol, dazzling in the brightness of perfect execution, but so dry and so hard the last refuge of the romantic escape into a dream which offers the only consolation from the unbearable contingency so real in *The Serpent and the Rope*.

Ambiguity: The axis of an anti novel

Since Raja Rao, according to his own admission as well as our analysis, arrives at the end of his journey as philosopher-novelist in *The Cat and Shakespeare*, a book on Rao's quest for form too should reach here its normal conclusion. But Rao seems to have arrived at a point where the seeming contradictions cease to be opposed only by denying the whole human experience. Such a summit of self-transcendence may at the same time indicate the precipice of autodestruction. In fact, the whole avant-gardism movement strives to some kind of self-annihilation. "Suicide, symbolic or actual," says Ihab Hassan, "becomes the consummation of the avant-garde: Therefore Raja Rao's next work, successor to the avant-gardist *The Cat and Shakespeare*, may present a kind of dramatic finality in its very *title-Comrade Kirillov* (1976), since in Dostoevsky's original, the Western literary tradition has found the very embodiment of self-annihilation as a metaphysical problem.

Raja Rao's *Comrade Kirillov,* to begin with, is an annihilation as a narrative insofar as it presents a non-plot in its flat succession of events without a perceptible rise into climax to be followed by purgation in emotional release. It may better be seen as a structure in which different segments are organized as parallels to the same thematic axis. In spatial terms this could mean the form of a prism, but in a verbal construct, the different units are to be unfolded, not simultaneously but in succession. So, unlike Rao's other novels which emphasize a continuous flow *Comrade Kirillov* is perceptibly marked into different blocks, separated from each other.

The first two sections are exact parallels, each narrates the biography of Padmanabha Iyer, a South Indian brahman (like Rao and all his heroes) in the third person. The narrator is one Rama ("a Gandhian and a Vedantin and an Indian" like Rao). In each, the narration leads to a focus on an ideological crisis presented as a dialogue between Padmanabha called Kirillov and Rama. First, we learn about Padmanabha's 'noble birth, Westernized education, disgust with modern India as well as with Hindu orthodoxy, a temporary frustrating experience with theosophy and his final choice of Communism. Rama meets him during the notorious purges of Stalin when he wants Padmanabha, as an Indian, to join in the protest against the Moscow trial. Padmanabha refuses and justifies the Party's stand.

In the second section we find Padmanabha's slow and pains-taking growth to his emergence as a good communist standing firmly behind the Party's policy to oppose Gandhi's call for nationalist agitation in 1942 against the British. Even after the Gandhian move seems to win, Padmanabha continues to be a communist. However, we learn that his life style has always remained orthodox, South Indian and brahmanic, despite his marriage to Irene, a Czech' communist who dies in childbirth leaving a son, Kamal.

The third section presents Padmanabha from a different perspective, that of his wife Irene, whose entries in diary reveal the subterranean "Indianness" of P. (padmanabha), ensconced not only in an orthodox life style or a sentimental illogical adoration of Gandhi, but in a brahmanic knowledge of the Sanskrit philosophical grammar. This Indianness which forms the main attraction of P to Irene, spells however the doom of the marriage, remaining a permanent incomprehensible element. Her death in childbirth seems inevitable following the entry, "I shall never go to India." In the last section, Padmanabha has disappeared behind the impenetrable communist curtains, first iron and then bamboo. But India wins, for his son Kamal, growing up with Indian grandparents, is placed by the narrator Rama in the temple of Kanyakumari and finds India embodied in Parvati, as an eternal virgin waiting for her bridegroom Shiva.

It is evident that in this novel a linear progression of events in causal order is subordinate to a structure which emanates from a concept of India as the matrix. By calling Padmanabha Kirillov, it is made quite obvious that communism can mean only suicide for an Indian. Hence Padmanabha's pen with which he writes his communist thesis is compared to a revolver. In Dostoevsky's Kirillov we can trace a literary prototype which is used here by Rao as though for mythical prefiguration.'o Kirillov stands as an archetype of the modem logical man of the West whose communist dialectic must end in selfannihilation." The interesting point in Rao's use however is the constant reference to Shatov, the other member of Dostoevsky's famous "double" . One may suppose that Padmanabha in his innate love for India and a certain kind of orthodox externalism (like the mechanical repetition of Sanskrit slokas, vegetarianism etc.) approximates Shatov's fervent love of Russia and orthodoxy. Being both Kirillov and Shatov, the communist atheist and the nationalist orthodox, Padmanabha remains a soul for ever held between the cleft of "India" and Marx a symbol of perpetual crisis.

The problem in *Comrade Kirillov* does not reside in Rao's presentation of the Indian communists which may appear justified to a Gandhian, malicious to a communist and inadequate to a student of history." Admittedly, Rao is being no more objective to the Indian communists than Dostoevsky' is toward his contemporary radicals in *The Possessed*. In fact, the question of impartiality to the opponent is simply irrelevant in a study of Raja Rao. Our main concern is with the concept of India for a number of reasons. Critics, both Indian and Western, not only recognize that Rao has such a definite concept of his own but also regard it-at least some of them-as a vital factor in a favourable aesthetic evaluation of his work. Rao himself regards the realization of "Indianness" as the focal point of all his creative effort. Since this concept happens to be, as we have seen, the thematic axis in *Comrade Kirillov,* we cannot proceed without first analyzing it, carrying threads from all his previous works.

It is imperative to realize first of all that Rao's concept of India has some remarkable resemblance with Dostoevsky's idea of Russia, which is to be emphasized since in the mainstream of the Indian literary tradition of the past, such a concept of national identity is virtually non-existent. In Dostoevsky, Russia and orthodoxy and Christianity are conceived as a composite as absolute as the Holy Trinity. This indissoluble bond is the great theme of Dostoevsky's whole literary inspiration, revealed especially in *The Possessed.* The following conversation between Stavrogin and Shatov presents a clue to Dostoevsky's concept of Russia:

> Stavrogin: "Christianity saves the world, and it alone can save it—that's the conclusion we have come to and that's what we believe. That is one thing. Next: Christianity exists only, in Russia, in the form of orthodoxy. That's two.
>
> Shatov: (Interrupting) And so Russia will save and regenerate the world through orthodoxy.
>
> Hence the irrevocable conclusion is: "An atheist cannot love Russia, or be a Russian." So, for Dostoevsky, Russia is not a political or historical entity, but rather a question of perspective of abstraction: "Russia is not a republic, it is not lacobinism or Communism. Russia is no more or no less than the embodiment of Orthodoxy."

It is impossible to miss a very clear echo in Rao's famous metaphysic of nationality, "India is not a country like France is, or like England; India is an idea, a metaphysic." *(The Serpent and the Rope)* Since for him, the Indian identity is inextricably bound with orthodoxy and a particular branch of Hindu philosophy namely Advaita Vedanta, one may find the trinity of India-Orthodoxy Vedanta, as the hypostasis of Rao's whole creative effort. Besides, Rao's India has a destiny, like Dostoevsky's Russia, to be apprehended with a missionary fervour. For his hero Ramaswamy. "India is the Guru to the world." Indeed one is left in no doubt of the author's firm conviction, "India is culture.

This romantic and aggressive view, often applauded by Rao's admirers, has however another facet, usually ignored by them, in providing a so-called metaphysical justification for a socio-economic order which brahmanism has continued to uphold in this country. The Absolute Consciousness, the Ultimate Truth, attainable through obliteration or "sacrifice" of mind and senses, logically so it seems, demands as "right living," a continuous sacrifice of the individual. Rao himself states in his article *Meaning of India*:

> Since there are gradations in man, and since man makes society- through gradations of social conditions, sometimes called castes, we daily make offering in sacrifice to the One (or The-One-Without-another) to whom everything flows as the rivers go to the ocean.

From an essentially brahmanic point of view, Rao justifies the traditionally rigid caste hierarchy of Hindu society, adding the gloss of a noble metaphysics, a palatable coat for a bitter pill. The political form of such a hierarchial tradition can hardly be democracy, so Rao's autobiographical projection declares himself a Royalist without compunction. The problem lies in the relation between this "India" orthodox, brahmanic, monarchist-and the historical context of Indian nationalism. If "gradations of man" are just, then the gradation between the conqueror and the conquered should logically be deemed equally just; indeed, the humiliation and exploitation of the ruled may appear a veritable offering to Rao's Vedantic Absolute.

So, in *Kanthapura*. Rao's first novel, the brahmanic orthodoxy sides with British imperialism. Gandhi's socio-political ideology, urging uprising against a king, questioning the inhuman treatment of the Untouchables as the lowest in the Hindu hierarchy, is rightly seen as a threat essentially directed towards the destruction of brahmanism. So Gandhi, cast as an *avatar* who should always be victorious, ends in the novel as the god that fails. Rao's brahmanic orthodoxy which is opposed by the Gandhian socio-political ideology, ultimately has to condone Gandhi's assassination. "Godse, who killed Mahauna Gandhi, was like Saint Dominic." *(The Serpent and the Rope)* The comparison of an assassin with a revered name in the Catholic Church, Saint Dominic, cannot but indicate Rao's evaluation of the most tragic incident in modem Indian history. For the Roman Catholic Church, St. Dominic's stand against Albigensian and Cathar heresies is both necessary and just. As a great Catholic poet describes Dominic's role:

Then, with both learning and zeal and with the apostolic office he went forth like a torrent driven from a high spring; and on the heretical thickets his force struck with most vigour where the resistance was stubbomes1. From him there sprung the various streams by which the Catholic garden is watered, so that its saplings have new life.

> If for Rao, Gandhi's assassin Godse is "like St. Dominic," the assassination is but an execution performed to save the brahmanic orthodoxy which is Rao's "India."

In *Comrade Kirillov,* however, the same Gandhi, by some strange inexplicable magic, is transformed into the very embodiment of true India, "The Communist party backed Britain, and lost their 1917. Mahatma Gandhi won. He would always win, for he knew India." One of the main channels in which Padmanabha's "Indian-hood" breaks through every communist chain "is his ado-ration of Gandhi." As Irene writes in her diary, "he cannot bear any European, bourgeois, or even communist, speak against the Congress or Gandhi," and he is also "so truly and inescapably orthodox." The straight opposition between these two attitudes should make one feel that both these cannot possibly be valid at the same time. In one, Gandhi is almost a heretic, pure and noble no doubt (even as the Cathar) yet essentially a diseased branch to be ruthlessly cut-off by Godse-Dominic to preserve the health of main brahmanic "Indian" tree. In the other, it is Gandhi that is true "India." The obvious opposition between the two poles, both presented presumably with the same authorial sincerity, raises the inevitable question: in which may we find the true Raja Rao?

It is this fundamental ambiguity that constitutes the axis of the very structure of *Comrade Kirillov* which therefore turns out to be a problematic novel embodying in its very form the crisis of the novelist The impasse that results from the Opposition between brahmanic orthodoxy and Indian nationalism makes mimesis an impossible task for Rao. His whole attention as a novelist turns of the act of composition, of writing itself. The novel whether traditional or modernist, holds to a tacit convention of suspension of disbelief and accords a hypothetical reality to the fictional representation created by the powerful writer god. So the reader consents to accept this fictive world as imitative of God's creation. In *Comrade Kirillov,* it is precisely this tacit and fundamental agreement between the reader and the writer that disappears. Since the novelist can no longer face the reality which for Rao is fraught with an unresolved problem, he can no longer imitate it even as a hypothetical reality, nor can he possibly possess that god-like omniscience into the souls of his characters which is the prerogative exercised by the traditional novelist.

All he can do is to suggest other literary characters as possible prototypes, a caricature of the traditional modernist prefiguration of characters by mythical personages. In Rao's own *Kanthapura* Gandhi is an avatar like Krishna, in *The Serpent and the Rope,* numerous mythical figures Tristan-Iseult, Krishna-Radha, Satyavan Savitri prefigure Ramaswamy Savithri in the fictional reality. Even in *The Cat and Shakespeare* the author persuades the reader to accept a surreality in which Govindan Nair is a veritable mother cat. But in *Comrade Kirillov* the novelist is *not certain* if his hero Padmanabha is really like the Kirillov of Dostoevsky facing logical suicide, for he cannot possibly know what goes on inside his own hero "a soul so ambivalent."

'Only that reality which is directly observable as Padmanabhha's behaviour and action, is acceptable in fiction. But his mind remains beyond authorial decisiveness and so any presentation of the inner state of Padmanabha is only speculative and merely fictive. Whereas in the traditional novel this fictiveness constitutes temporal reality, in *Comrade Kirillov* the emphasis falls on fiction as fiction. The novelist bares the whole process of composition m which the reader is asked to participate, he can no longer remain at the receiving end." His stability in the reading experience is un-settled for he has to cease being a passive spectator transported into a provisionally solid fictional presentation because he has to come in aid of the author for whom the external reality is beyond comprehension, an absurd universe. This problematic essence is effected with the help of a unique linguistic device-protracted use of the conditional as a grammatical fiction:

> One could *almost* see our Kirillov, a pistol in his pocket, going round and round his shouting wife's (other man's) child, like Shatov, and *if* our Kirillov *were smitten* with dialectical despair, *no doubt* he too *would go* round and round his Wakefield Square flat, now to the dim kitchen, now to the empty hall, with only the big picture of Lenin on its rose-coloured paper, and rushing up to set some unfinished sentence of the translation right, he *might* stop a while, look into the dictionary for the favoured word, and with pen on his forehead remember each act of sin committed in angry solitude, and rushing to the telephone, he *might* ask his labour friend's pardon for every mistake in party prognostics, and dialling some innocent like me, *might* ask me for the final favour of a quick departure to the other world.

We may find in this paragraph, some classic linguistic signs of the author's deliberate dissociation from the character's consciousness-the verbal constructs that control the meaning are all indicative of chance, of sheer contingency as though beyond authorial control-might (3 times), *could*, the construction-if ... *were* ... *would—suggests* even deeper hesitation; the qualifiers *(almost, no doubt)* emphasize interpretative effort rather than surety of factual reports." In the traditional modernist fiction, the super-imposition of mythical prototypes of fictional characters is carried out in good faith according to the convention binding the reader and the novelist. But here that convention does not operate any more.

The continued use of such uncertainty in verbal constructions in *Comrade Kirillov* emphasizing the alienation of the author from his creation, affects the stability of the reader's stance towards the experience of the novel. If Padmanabha *might* have been a Kirillov, *would* behave like a Shatv, it is never clear to the readers what Padmanabha now actually is in the fictional reality. This lack of stability is carried to the extreme in the. *probable* end of Padmanabha *if* he embraces Buddhism:

> which made me often feel that *were* Kirillov *capable* of free thinking and not tied to a dogma, *would not* his sensibility *have* found radiance in the Buddhist Path of Non-Becoming, or *would not* his dialectical coldness, his razoredge honesty, lead him, like Mayakovsky or Essenine, to an intellectual death.

One may wonder if the Buddhist yellow-robe, the alternative to a Marxist "intellectual death," is an equally disastrous end for an Indian or the very hope of redemption. The use of the word *radiance* may suggest a positive connotation which is later confirmed in the last glimpse that is left of Padmanabha-a hypothetical Buddha defeating the deadly Tempter, now embodied as Marxism. Here is Rao's Kirillov who, firm in his "Indian decision," sits in meditation to attain the ultimate, and "Mara himself appears in fearful fascination" tempting with Communist trinkets:

> "Go, go, Mara, Kirillov would say, "I know of your doings. I know the dialectic of Feurbach, and the State and the Revolution of Lenin. Marx has been suppressed by hagiography, and Lenin is in his tomb. Go, you many-mouthed, many-armed, you multiple-monster, Mara."

The novelist persuades himself desperately to believe that here at last is the lone stable point of fictional reality which is therefore conveyed in the conventional narrative past, ,. And there out of the burst of light Kirillov *recovered* his native Kingdom." This decisive stance is however momentary, to be immediately unsettled:

> In the Deer-park of intelligence he *set* his wheel-of-law a–turning and *wandered* over the vast and wonder some land of Hindusthan, working the Law of non-becoming. The wheel turns like a temple chariot's and Mahatma Gandhi himself *pulls* the ultimate cord.

That the redemption of Padmanabha/Kirillov is only mythical, more a wish-fulfilment than a reality is revealed in the use of the present tense which is psychologically, the tense of dream. In the deliberate archaism *(a-turning, wondersome)* the whole picture of reality is further distanced. That it is only an illusion and nothing but speculation is emphasized in the short paragraph which follows informing with sharp finality as well as the authority of the novelist conveyed in the traditional past tense, "Kirillov, indefatigable left for Moscow."

As a matter of fact, Buddha can be accepted as a part of the Indian reality only in a dream, for hasn't the orthodox brahman in *The Serpent and the Rope* so elaborately rejected Buddha? Buddha's logic and compassion open the road to liberation for *all* mankind irrespective of caste, which Rao's own rigid brahmanical, hierarchy can never consent to. So both Christ and Buddha being compassionate are banished from Rao's "perfect" civilization which is Indian/orthodox/ brahmanic, called Vedantic.

Buddha, therefore, can never be a part of Rao's India. How can then Padmanabha the communist regain his "Indianness" through Buddhism since Buddha himself is to be cast out from the brahmanic orthodoxy equated with Indianness? Rao never answers this ques-tion out we can attempt to explain the impasse referring to the historical context. The Indian nationalism in order to minimize the Western components which are historically valid has to place Buddha over and above brahmanic orthodoxy, for the ideals of Indian nationalists—anti-racism, democracy, non-violence etc. cannot be traced to the brahmanic caste hierarchy or authoritarianism nor to the paramount importance placed on force and absence of humanism that characterize brahmanic political ethics."

It is only by emphasizing the Buddhist non-violence and the Buddhist insistence of ethics that Indian nationalism can find its distinctive identity, distinguished from the concept of Western nationalism from which it springs If communism is to be condemned as a specifically *alien* creed, which fails to find roots in the Indian soil, its use of violence and its subordination of means to the end can be fought not with brahmaoic but with Buddhist weapons alone. The communist Pad-manabha can redeem himself only by putting on the Buddhist yellow-robe.

A Parody of the Self

For Raja Rao's orthodox brahmanic stand, there is no justification for the resuscitation of Buddha whom he has buried with open denunciation in *The Serpent and the Rope.* He has to remain silent therefore over the crucial question, the relation between his uncompromising and exclusive brahmanic orthodoxy proclaimed as a metaphysic of India and the broad Indian Nationalism which seems at least in theory to harmonize the diverse elements in the culture of this sub-continent. Nothing is more significant or more absolute than Rao's total silence over this fundamental issue at this mature stage of his life as a writer.

The emphasis on a highly exaggerated opposition between the Indian nationalism of the Gandhians and the internationalism of the Indian communists, presumed to be "false" because of "alien" roots, seems inspired by an urgent need for a diversionary tactic which overrides the artist's genuine involvement in the reality of India where the static authority of the brahman is being challenged by a dynamic and modem consciousness. The tone of an incessant chatter which predominates the first two sections of the novel—often rising to a feverish peak in the long speeches of Padmanabha the communist and Rama, the Gandhian-is an indication of the desperate urge for a cover to hide the basic truth which the author is unable to face.

The weight of complete silence makes the novel essentially an essay in the negative particularly because Raja Rao himself was at one point of time an ardent admirer of socialism, if not of Marxism. He even confided, "un fort mouvement socialiste, ou prosocialiste travaille, 'Inde nouvelle et 'emportera, un depit de 'la bigoterie' (sous-entendu du Mahatma) et de la faiblesse de Jawaharlal Nehru, qui est Ie plus conscient, pourtant de ce mouvement." One can hardly fail to note the association of bigotry with the Mahatma. So the savage satire on the Indian communists who slavishly "toe the British" since Hitler's attack of Russia, is illumined by a ferocious glare which turns on the self in caricature. The author manipulates the speech-act of another-here that of an Indian Communist-with a deliberate intention of opposing it. Take for example the following passage:

> And by some peculiar *perfect* psychological transference his *perfect* un-Darwinian enemy was this Mahatma Gandhi, *friend and fool* of the poor, the *Sadhu reactionary* who *still believed in caste and creed* and such categories, and whose birth in this world had set history many centuries backwards. Marx had *indeed* built in his theory of revolution for the British working classes revolting against their masters, her-aided by the rising in the vast dominion of the British crown called India-and *Mahatma Gandhi came* and upset Marx. If Marx were alive *no doubt* Mahatma Gandhi would have received, under the *truculent pen* of the *great master,* the destiny he deserved.

Gandhi was *somewhat of an oriental Mazzini,* with Indian mysticism *to boot.*

The linguistic features underlined, present a curious juxtaposition of two voices the speech ostensibly belongs to an Indian communist yet the attitude of the Gandhian opponent determines the semantics for Gandhi is ultimately declared invincible. Further Gandhi's acquiescence to caste, creed and what the author terms "Indian mysticism" are mentioned not so much because these provide the Marxists their conventional weapons for attack against Gandhi but actually because these elements express the orthodox author's own point of approval. As a contrast one may remember an eminent Marxist intellectual's evaluation of Gandhi as "one of the great social reformers of history" for the jolt he gave to untouchability and his final assessment of the Mahatma as a paradox:

"Gandhi was at the same time conservative and revolutionary." Rao's Marxist hero evades the fundamental question-the specific definition of the Gandhian ideal, his concept of Swaraj and Ramrajya which was raised by Moorthy at the end of *Kanthapura.* So Rao's deliberate distortion of the Marxist attitude leads to facetious features in style—repetition *(perfect),* alliteration *(friend and fool),* use of unnecessary qualifiers *(indeed, no doubt great, trucu-lent, somewhat),* facile juxtaposition *(and Gandhi came* with *and upset Marx* as though a causal relation between the two is naturally established)—and enhance the polemical shading of the discourse. Its characteristic mark however lies in the *concealed* nature of the polemics. Through Padmanabha, Rao apparently represents the typical communist viewpoint with which he himself once sympathized, but at the same time as an orthodox brahman—which he later became—he reacts to it and this reaction seeks to determine the tone of the text. "The second voice," as Mikhail Bakhtin analyzes parody, "having lodged in another speech, clashes antagonistically with the original host voice and forces it to serve directly opposite aims." In *Comrade*

Kirillov, both the voices having belonged to the different selves of the author, offer constant self-parody.

The victory of Gandhi in achieving Indian independence over the Communist prognosis of proletariat revolution, may be seen as a crushing reply to Rao's own hero Moorthy who left Gandhi for socialism. Padmanabha's Marxist stand itself is a devastating parody of Gandhi's own words to Moorthy, those very words which led Moorthy to break from the brahmanic shackles:

> There is but one force in life and that is Truth, and there is but one love in life and that is the love of mankind, and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all.

Compare Padmanabha's declaration:

> I know only one God, and that is the common man, I know only one worship and that is the Party meeting. I know only one morality, and that is a classless society.

In Padmanabha's defence of Stalin's notorious purges, there is a violent attack on the Marxist dialectic of history. What is more important from the literary point of view is the deliberate parody of Rao's own serious fictional presentation in defence of the same Stalin and the same purges in *The Serpent and the Rope* not once or casually, but again and again with full involvement. Ramaswamy elaborates the "Indian" justification of Stalin's blood-thirst:

> The King can do no wrong: comes from the idea that *the principle can do no wrong* just as the communists say: "The party can do no wrong." Talking of the communists the other day in Cambridge, I forgot to say that communism must succeed; happily for us, to be followed by Kingship. Look at the difference between Hitler and Stalin. Stalin, the man of iron, the mystery behind the Kremlin, *the impersonal*

> *being, to whom torture, growth or death are essentials of an abstract arithmetic.* As the Catholics looked for omens in the Bible, Stalin looked to *impersonal history* for guidance.

Since Rao, like his hero Ramaswamy supports the Roman Catholic Church, he admires Stalin as the embodiment of orthodoxy, "the new Catholicism" and so Trotsky is a heretic, "anther Cathar" It is natural that "Stalin who is history, had to kill Trotsky, the anti-history. The pure, the human, the vainglorious leader's personal magic was an unholy impediment to the movement of history." The emphasis on negatives *(anti-history, vainglorious unholy),* indicates the tonal evaluation-condemnation of Trotsky—from presumably an "Indian" standpoint In *Comrade Kirillov,* it is precisely in the same view—the same condemnation of Trotsky as an impediment to the historical process-that Padmanabha seems to annihilate this "Indianness":

> Trotsky is a traitor, I say. A traitor for me is not my moral enemy, but my historical opponent I know simpletons write that Trotsky has sold out to the capitalists. I know, as far as I can, that Trotsky is not the one to be bribed by capitalists into their golden dens. Trotsky, like Zinoviev and Kameniev, was an instrument in a great historical process. For that matter, so is Stalin. If Stalin went against history, history would not spare him because he is Stalin. History is the respector of no individual. . . .I am a communist because I understand history.

Thus Padmanabha as Kirillov repeats all the arguments of Ramaswamy, Rao's frank autobiographical projection and stands condemned for his alienation from "Indianness." The sharp difference in tone, from authorial approbation in the first to denunciation in the second is conveyed through language and language alone since the theme remains the same. The tone here reveals how the concept of Indianness has simply jumped to the opposite pole. The narrator Rama asks for Padmanabha's signature to a demand for fair trial of Stalin's victims on the following "Indian" ground:

> The cause is good. You know politics is something I do not fully understand. Human suffering, life, birth, death, sick-ness, marriage and love, God, I understand. I hate violence of all sorts especially political violence.

The position here is conveyed imperceptibly but decisively with the use of the word *good, understand,* indicative of positive values. Violence, which is deemed impersonal and essential in the first, is considered evil, a moral judgement which forms the basis of "hate," for, India that is impersonal in *The Serpent and the Rope* becomes personal and moral in *Comrade Kirillov.* It resides in a due recognition of *human suffering* and *God* both of which were particularly rejected earlier. For Rao, as for his hero Ramaswamy the uncompromising Vedantin, the world being a *maya* neither suffering nor God can exist. Hence the "Indian" quest seems to arrive at the Truth and not at faith in God, as Ramaswamy clearly states "Do I long for God? God is an object and I cannot long for Him." The novel has ended, not in the resignation to faith in God, but in a refuge at the feet of a preceptor of Truth. Even in the epiphany of his humble successor Ramkrishna Pai, the hero of *The Cat and Shakespeare,* there is no God.

Yet in *Comrade Kirillov,* the full volley of "Indian" attack is directed at the absence of God in Communism. As Padmanabha in his destructive "spider web," "prison-cell" logic expounds, "Metaphysical enquiry, I now say, is due to rachitism—it is like a disease caused by vitamin deficiency. God is the fiction of the lazy." The cynicism is conveyed through the violent grouping of utter dissimilarities, especially mundane and spiritual, by words of negative *connotation—disease, deficiency, fiction* (in the sense of mere untruth) and *lazy.* For the communist, as it suggests, God is negation. For the Indian on the other hand it is Communism that is annihilation. The narrator puts it thus:

> And once you have fed the Indian millions and given them nice houses *to live* in and railways *for their monthly holidays* and sanatoria *for their sick*, and maternity care *for their mothers*, and the Dniperstock *for the electric illumination of India-what* then, brother, is to become of your despair, your emotional upheavals, your metaphysical yeaming, your God -ward beckonings?

That the communist hope of future India is only a dream, as distant from reality as a myth, is indicated especially by an absurd rhythmic regularity, a parody of Rao's own fabular presentation of India, created by Brahma in *Kanthapura*:

> You gave her the sage-loved Himalayas *on the north* and the seven surging seas *to the south* and you gave her the Ganges *to meditate* on the Godavery, *to live by*, and the pure Cauvery *to drink in*.

If the material comfort promised by the communists seems a poor and shabby substitute for the rich, poetic and mystic Hindu heritage, it is because of the linguistic parody that is evident in this comparison. Besides the very elaboration of material comfort leads ultimately to *negation—despair, emotional upheaval*, for *God* is forgotten.

Such persistent and unabashed self-contradiction can arise only out of a deep and overwhelming urge for self-negation. The novel therefore stages a solipsistic drama of self and anti-self. Since Rao himself, after a bout of socialist infection caught in the epidemic of the thirties was duly restored to the health and security of brahmanic orthodoxy, Padmanabha, the South Indian brahman communist, might very well be Rao's alter ego. The narrator Rama (Vedantin, Indian etc.) is of course the official self of the author that has come to be established before the public eye. But there is another self hidden in Padmanabha, indicated by his probable like-ness to Shatov which may indeed hold a true resemblance to Rao himself. In fact, the reference to Shatov has a dual function. Besides suggesting Padmanabha's subterranean love for India, it may very well stand as the symbol of Rao's own ambivalence to the very concept of India. Shatov professes to believe in Russia, orthodoxy and Christianity, the Holy Trinity of Dostoevsky. But, like Raja Rao, he had a stint of revolutionary association, although later on he desperately desires to cut himself away from it. The corruption generated by the "noble socialist ideal" however has left its indelible mark on his orthodox self. So when Stavrogin, the black guru of the double, mercilessly challenges his faith in God, Shatov is plunged into a wild fury:

> "I believe in Russia .... I believe in the Greek orthodox church. I-I believe in the body of Christ. .. .I believe that second coming will take place in Russia .... I believe ... " Shatov murmured in a frenzy. "But in God? In God?"
>
> "I shall believe in God."

This desperate hesitancy, enshrined as the very epigraph of Rao's novel, belongs as much to Padmanabha/Kirillov as to the creator himself. Hence obsessive tendency to refer to. Shatov again and again in the narrative although there is no resemblance between the action of Padmanabha's story and Shatov's. Dostoevsky presents Shatov's jubilation at his wife's return to give birth to the child of another man, as an act of profound redemption, fervent with true Christian charity. This incident, with little logic, is alluded to by Rao to mark some mysterious resemblance with Padmanabha's "dialectical despair" or his running for a nurse during his wife's confinement.

The line of similarity which lies in a common love for country, orthodoxy and a particular religion, all mixed together, is never quite brought out. It is precisely due to this eloquent silence that the spectre of Dostoevsky's classic figure of ambivalence tends in Rao's novel to dwarf Kirillov's logical suicide. If Shatov is evoked by Rao to redeem Padmanabha, the device certainly produces a strange effect by straining the demarcation between art and life which constitutes the conventional aesthetic distance. In fact the reader is uncomfortably aware of some secret bond extending beyond fiction between Padmanabha and the narrator Rama, who meets him only twice during the whole action for there are often allusions of a continuous association not only with Padmanabha, but even with Irene.

He meets Irene only once yet mysteriously he seems to "owe" her a great duty." With the actual entrance of R.R explained in the footnote as' "Raja Rao (the author)" the distance is further reduced, since we come to know of Raja Rao's aesthetic sensibility (Which Rao's interviewers have noted), his English as a combination of the Bible and Shakespeare (which we have already analyzed as such) his romantic propensities "Some Tristan" which explains Rao's autobiographical hero Ramaswamy. In the narrative of Padmanabha, Raja Rao has absolutely no role to play and is in fact an addition in the definitive English edition alone. His function, therefore, is entirely formal to lessen the customary distance between art and life just as it is being done in the new drama to expose the theatricality *or* the traditional theatre. So the consciousness in focus is a perpetual shift-Kirillov-Padmanabha, Shatov Rama, Raja Rao which constitutes such a fusion and confusion of identities revolving on the axis of ambiguity that no stable self seems to emerge even as a residue." One may find this confusion or the subtle intermingling, in the linguistic characteristic of a constant shift of the authorial focus in the personal pronoun.

Apart from the three clear divisions-third person-out-sider in the first two sections, first-person in Irene's journal holding dual focus "I" (Irene) and "he" (P.) third-person omniscient nar-rator in the concluding section, there is a constant mixing up of *he, you* and even *I* in the first two sections relating Padmanabha's life. For many, including Roland Barthes, the use of persons in narrator's focus indicates an attitude towards the whole writing process. Traditionally, *I* or *you* is the opposite of *he* or *it* which is called "the sign of absence" The use of all the persons to focus the same consciousness in the same discourse may therefore indicate a constant self-contradiction arid consequently an unstable attitude towards the writing process. Take for example the following pas-sages, when the focus of each is Padmanabha and the narrator is the same Rama:

> (a) So Kirillov learnt German in order to read Marx and Engels, French to read Fourier and Saint Simon, and little by little he was pushed into Lenin and the holy Russian tongue. Engels seemed a very machine of monumental and systematized thought, and as for Marx one does not talk about that greater Master.
>
> (b) This colour problem in England is terrible-you always know what you *are* through others' eyes. You cannot walk a mile without discovering yourself over and again a hundred times, and even thick eyeglasses are no protection to you. You seemed small in comparison with the sturdy English, and your colour was chocolate, when it was not terribly coffee. Sometimes the umbrella saved your neighbourly discomfort,' and in the parks a newspaper. But if you chanced on a negro in the parks, he told you more woeful tales than any heard in New York, and you took a superior sympathy on his darkened skin. With Indian independence not far off, you felt the protective elder, and a sure friend.
>
> (c) All men in Marxism have anonymous names, and death—this last biological act-is an act of sheer surgery against betrayal. I will not betray my ideas—I am hungry. I die. The messiah will rise of my blood, and the colours of the communist land are the blue of meditations. Come, comrade death, I am yours.

In passage (a), the narrator presumes to be completely detached and satirical, in (b) this sarcasm is tempered with the feeling that the situation in hand ("the colour problem in England") is after all somewhat general which may be shared by the author as by the readers, in, (c), there is, for the moment, a complete identification and full involvement. There is a perpetual, almost mercurial restlessness that characterizes the whole tone of discourse shifting from heavy sarcasm to light irony, then to sympathy arriving at last to adoration. If savage criticism marks most of the passages in the first two sections strong, admiration counterbalances in the following:

> He was so *like a child,* was Kirillov, when it came to simple things; he *loved India* with a noble, *delicate unreasoned love.* He loved her poetry as few among the so-called educated ones in India had—he loved the intricacies, the permutations, the magnitude of the *Sanskrit* verse. To hear him recite *Sanskrit* verse was like listening to a Pandit from Tanjore. His *sincerity,* his *enthusiasm,* his *learning,* were all alike—of one *sovereign made.*

The tone of approval almost always mingles with the author's own identification with the character. Hasn't Rao again and again glorified Sanskrit? "Je suis obsede par Ie sanskrit," declares Rao proudly; for him Sanskrit is not a language but a means to arrive at *connaissance,* "qui, fonde sur la metaphysique et la grammaire, permeted' atteindre la liberation spirituelle."

The Prison of Language

Since the Marxist Padmanabha evokes alienation and satire and the brahman Padmanabha (in possession of self in Sanskrit) marks total identification and eulogy, it is significant that when these two confront each other in Sanskrit philosophy of word and Marxist science of language—the consequence is a riddle and a total defeat of language. As the blurb in the French edition states, Rao's Padmanabha, the communist brahman, attempts to use "la grammaire Sanskrit au service du materialisme dialectique." So he applies the abstruse theory of *Sphota* "the central word-principle" to assess a "'Marxist classic" namely Stalin's congratulatory telegram to Hitler on the conquest of Poland which is set down thus:

(1) the word reduced to its sound-value -, then to its vibratory value, then finally to its etheric (akashic is the Sanskrit for it) structural value, is reduced to exact nothingness. 2) It is this universal nothingness that makes all permutations possible. 3) *In modern language we would say* all objects are ultimately reducible to the electromagnetic field and sound and object being one, they can be interpreted in terms of the wave equivalents, etc. 4) Marxism is a science. 5) A set of human, vocal vibrations—and in this case teleprinter—probably only produced the required physico-chemical transformation of the auditive and cerebral mechanisms, and produced a recognizable sound effect. 6) Then the word is born. 7) Stalin's congratulatory letter could be reduced to sheer scientific computation to form some seventeen hundred wave-components. 8) Hitler is pleased. 9) Stalin gets his time. 10) That is Marxism. 11) Hitler's message is physicochemical vibration in ether.

From the standpoint of sheer content, the passage strikes one as a violent and irrational forcing together of concepts belonging to different spheres and different levels of human knowledge—a metaphysical theory and a physical concept directed towards *word*, a linguistic unit." The underlying assumptions of such juxtaposition are questionable, especially the facile equation between the metaphysical "nothingness" of the structure of word and the so-called physico-chemical reduction' to vibration in "modern language." No less disconcerting is the simplistic conclusion that such a physical view must necessarily be the Marxist concept of word." (Since "Marxism is a science.")

The failure at the conceptual level to construct a well-integrated and developed structure reveals itself in the stylistic features—an unusual predominance of over-simple constructions (nos. 4, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11) especially when expressing serious and decisive stages of thought. "Complex sentences combining numbers of deep structures in a variety of ways," says Roger Fowler, "suggest, rightly or wrongly logical sophistication, precision, mental flexibility.") It is therefore significant that Rao can be "logical" and "flexible" only in reproducing the idea that is already accepted-enunciation of the physical theory of sound (no. 3 and 5) because all the sentences that have some complexity in structure belong to this one category. Rao's *own* conclusions are almost invariably cast in the simplest structures, and so betray nearly authoritarian rigidity and total absence of logic culminating in "that is Marxism." Also, to be noted is the relative absence of connectives which mark logical development of thought so much so that Rao's style often, as here, tends to be paratectic.

The paucity of syntactic elaboration cannot but be seen as indicative of the author's refusal to analyze and explore an idea, and makes one feel that he wants to impose his private views, arrived at without logic, on his readers rather than to persuade through analysis. One may wonder if a deliberate and persistent shrinking away from syntactic elaboration in the surface structure whenever there is a private conclusion or view involved, does not suggest a disjunction of a fundamental nature, which strains the relation between the signifier and the signified to a point of total meaninglessness. Can we accept the contention that Stalin's congratulatory telegram to Hitler is a "Marxist classic" because it is "a physico-chemical vibration in ether" composed of "hundred wave-components"? How would the "classic" character be affected, if the number of components had been 16 hundred 99 or 17 hundred and one? Does the physico-chemical vibration lead to the reaction mentioned in nos (8) and (9)? or in the "sheer scientific computation" or in their "combination"? Besides if vibrations produce sound (no.8) then the *Sphota* theory has to be abandoned for the latter postulates the vibrations as "one of the numerous *results of* sound and not, *as it is commonly held*, its cause."

The most important consequence of this so-called Brahman -Marxist presentation of language is an utter silence as to the *meaning* of the telegram in the human context of history—that a Communist power has upheld an imperialist aggression. The whole emphasis of the irrational combination of *Sphota* and Physics is directed towards a virtual murder of language, for it is reduced to a lifeless structure of formal components entirely devoid of human content, which is bound to the ideological, social and ultimately to the living reality or phenomenon. Not all the profundity of the *Sphota* theory, nor the immaculate perfection of physical science can fill in the gaping void that overcomes the whole meaningful attitude of the author to the telegram of Stalin.

A linguistic expression stretches through the "interindividual territory" which is sought to be irrevocably suppressed. As a result the reader is left in complete confusion as to the author's evaluation of the character in specific situation. Does this Marxist-brahmanic interpretation represent a secret synthesis in the fragmented soul of the hero, or the absurdity of an attempt at such synthesis? The total withdrawal of authorial stance marks the deepest abyss of negation-the defeat of language. 37 If a statement in language embedded at a certain point of historical reality is nothing but some physico-chemical vibrations, the author who builds up his fictional world with words must be an absurd creator, for his verbal universe cannot but be unintelligible to himself.

The basic alienation that informs such incomprehensibility manifests itself in spectacular devices of dehumanization. The re-volt against reason which takes the form of surreal fullness of fantasy in Rao's previous novel, here reveals the obverse-the void. The attack against logic as a particular Marxist stronghold ultimately betrays a separation from nature, from the vital process of life. Take for example the description of the wife of Padmartabha, Irene, whose womanhood seems to reside in "specific reflexes, glandular and neurotic":

> Kirillov really loved Irene. She had the red blood, the red hair, the passionate index finger, and dialectics had drained her lust into irate channels.

If we remember the glory of sensuous detail in the presentation of Madeleine who is a woman in *The Serpent and the Rope*, even of Shantha who is womanhood in *The Cat and Shakespeare*. we perhaps feel something frightening in the presentation of Irene, in such deliberately pathological terms, which precludes not only poetry but also the reality of human body as a whole. If physical colour is mentioned at all, its origin lies in the abstract-the Party—for it is red. She no longer possesses even the biological entity of woman, reduced to "the index finger," since it is she who seems to be the bringer of "this new world" or Communism to a brahman. The creation of a new life for Irene and Padmanabha has therefore no emotional background, no sensual acceptance of the body, but a dehydrated victory of India in abstraction:

> Kirillov even meditated, in expiation, upon the birth of a child—he would now have a child, they would have a boy, and he would be an Indian.

Objects and abstractions therefore dominate over human characters in *Comrade Kirillov.* The bare surroundings of Padmanabha-the spare kitchen without even a glass, the lone piece of cheese, receive detailed attention. It is impossible to miss the emphasis on the lifeless items-like Kirillov's dress, his pants, trousers, shuts, coat, shoes, socks—all receive a kind of authorial notice usually due to human beings." Kirillov's necktie may present the very essence of dehumanization in the novel. An extreme pathetic fallacy enhances the desiccation of humanity since it blandly assumes a total interchangeability of man and object. From the length and also the kind of emphasis that the tie receives from the author, there is no doubt that in Kirillov's emotional life it has not only an "absurd inevitability" but even an inexplicable static value denied to any human being. The narrator Rama arrives with a purpose and Padmanabha adjusts "the curve of his slightly distended neckue, It was as though he were turning to his wife and saying, 'Hello, dear, what is this?" When he victoriously expounds the Communist standpoint, he does not look to Irene, wife and comrade, but seeks assurance in the necktie which "received its pattings and it hissed and curled in ritual approval." This object is Padmanabha's "boon companion, his poetry, his sole possession," the focus of his nightly meditation which is to match the communist activity of the day. The necktie indeed is the most valuable key to the presentation of reality in the novel:

> Kirillov's real name was Padmanabha Iyer, but his necktie had such *praterplusparenthetical* curve, as though much concrete philosophy had gone into its making, and. It revealed a soul so ambivalent that I could not gaze on its self-aware turpitudes without human compassion.

If one presumes "human compassion" as antithesis to the lifeless object's "turpitude," the first belonging to the "Indian" narrator, the latter a characteristic of the Communist alter ego, the certainty of meaning will be immediately unsettled by a reality in which the object is not only "self-aware" but reveals "a soul" and contains "some concrete philosophy." The absurd verbal coinage (*prraterplusparenthetical*), a Joycean imitation, leaves the lasting impression of a reality which has become meaningless.

So the novelist can suggest a meaning only by a total escape from life, in surrender to the pre-literary category of myth. The axis of the novel's structure-Indiannness-is ultimately bared to the readers as the legend of the Eternal

Virgin which Kamal, the son of Irene and Padmanabha, finds in the temple of Kanyakumari. Incidentally, Kamal, born either in 1942 or before 1939 is now, "dur-ing the present split in the C.P.I." (Communist Party of India) which happened in 1964, still a child playing with a toy-horse carried on the shoulder by the narrator Rama. This licence with time fits no doubt the fabular end and may be found in consonance with the high-handed atemporality of the new fiction. The legend that Ratna recounts to Kamal indicates the last testament of a crisis which has manifested itself in complicated involutions, in cunning equivocation analyzed in each preceding section. We are told that India is like Parvati, who in love with life goes to the South to immerse herself in the enjoyment of this phenomenal reality, "beautiful fruits, flowers, perfumes, medicinal herbs, precious stones, sweet water" which she refuses to renounce in a travel up the cold Himalayas to meet her consort Shiva who, lost in meditation, fails to come at the auspicious hour of marriage.

The pertinent question here is, who is Lord Shiva in terms of the novel's political context of Indian nationalism? The text offers apparently no visible clue and Parvati is left forever awaiting her indifferent bridegroom. The narrative insists on the failure of the Indian communists to join the Gandhian national upsurge, and since Parvati is "India," to fulfil, the expectation of a formal coherence the forgetful consort should point towards the recalcitrant Indian Marxist. But the Communist, the Marxist in Rao is "above all a realist" for whom "metaphysical enquiry" is due to a physiological disorder and "God is lie." On the other hand it is the orthodox brahman bent on salvation alone, who "asks for more inquiry into your biological, psychological, and psychic self delimiting you bit by bit into acute dissolution ...."

"A symbol," says Camus, "indeed assumes two planes, two worlds of ideas and sensations, and a dictionary of correspondences between them" and further it "transcends the one who makes use of it and makes him say in reality more than he is aware of expressing." So in the inference of the reader, Rao's Shiva may represent what the author is not perhaps prepared to admit, namely, the failure of orthodox brahmanism which disdained the young Indian nation at a crucial point of history. So, for the orthodox brahman intellectual, India, like Parvati, deified in the temple as Kanyakumari, remains an abstraction, a metaphysic, cold and formal like the stone idol even as remote. The quest for an Indian identity of an orthodox brahman ends in an obsession with form, the abstract *image* since the Indian reality of sight and sound, touch and taste lies for ever beyond the grasp of transcendence.

This interpretation of the legend may of course appear per-verse to Rao's admirers, to whom Rao may represent the soul of India but it is the only meaning that emerges from the structure of the novel as an artistic venture. *Comrade Kirillov,* as we have seen, is not a traditional fiction involved in the contemporary politicai context as Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* so obviously is. For Koestler, the realistic form could be easily grounded in his personal sympathy with the victims of the Moscow trial, crystallized in his central character Rubashov. The Western critique of the "purges" derives from liberal humanism which however is not at all valid in Rao's stand on orthodoxy. Besides written so long .after the actual incidents and with the background of Rao's own transformation from an ardent socialist to an uncompromising orthodox, the novel is a symbolic presentation of selfcriticism which can be apprehended only in terms of its language.

The stylistic caricatures of *Kanthapura* and *The 'Serpent and the Rope* are manipulated to arrive at a new signification which upgrades the legend of Kanyakumari from a mere finishing touch into a determinant factor controlling the whole structure. The satiric devaluation which occupies the greater length of the novel leads to romantic idealization in the legend at the end. This mixture however is in consonance with the Western tradition because the form of allegory offers ways of combining satire and romance. If we apply Rao's own theory of *Sphota-the* Indian philosophy of grammar—to the organization of the text, the last section immediately becomes the most revealing.

The novel may be taken as a linguistic whole, like a *word;* each of the four sections is an individual letter arranged in temporal succession. So the satiric portrayal of the communist self of Padmanabha, the sentimental identification with the brahman, scholarly, and Gandhian Padmanabha, cannot indicate either separately or conjointly, the real meaning of the whole. It is the "structural nothingness," the void generated by the impasse of the author in relation to reality, by the very ambiguity of the concept of India, that functions as *sphota* and has made the different permutations of form in those sections possible, and ultimately manifests itself as meaning, fixed by the last unit even as the last sound, according to the *Sphota* theory and upheld by Roo here, determines the sense of a word composite of letters pronounced in succession.' It is the stone form that lends permanence to the rejection of Parvati's womanhood and embodies the final dehumanization of art as the desperate refuge of a brahmanic self, bent on transcendence.

9

Conclusion

In the analysis of the novels of Raja Rao we have considered the structure of each work, the hierarchical arrangement of the different components of plot, narrative technique and language which constitute the total form. It is now apparent that in the quest for an Indian identity, the novelist has tried to develop an individual form, groping for a proper dominant which should satisfy the inherent logic of each structure. In the beginning the theme of Time dominates in the pattern of novel. In the juxtaposition of the mythical potential of Mahatma as an incarnation and the actual political and social reality of the time controlled by forces emanating from elsewhere, it is the principle of conflict that operates.

The representational form is quite effective in the delineation of the traditional activities of a Hindu village, but fails to integrate the historical reality into the pattern of myth for the complexities of the present life prove to lie beyond the control of artistic form. The realistic aspect is further emphasized by the technique of *Skaz*, the orientation to the common man's speech habits, realized in the peasant grandmother-narrator with plenty of local colour and colloquialism. At the same time there is stylization clearly originating from the author's poetic sensibility, and the reality is sought to be distanced through a handful of rhetorical devices. The whole experiment is severely limited to a few constructs, a few figures of speech which are repeated ad infinitum. So the climax registers a failure of technique and style since the intention to present reality in dramatic immediacy confuses the hierarchical relationship among different components and reveals an undue emphasis on the fore-grounded elements of style without the relief that a background of normalcy alone provides. A long unfocused flow of narrative, from which the main characters have disappeared, imitates speech, and' at the same time punctures it ineffectively with literary rhetoric.

Here is a total surrender to actuality although traditional realism depends for its aesthetic tactics on a balance between mind and world at a specific point of time. But in *Kanthapura* this balance is upset with the reality of time posing a fundamental problem for the authorial personality self-divided between the Gandhian ideology of Indian nationalism and his strong, latent brahmanic orthodoxy. His concern with the contemporary reality of India, fraught with the urgent problem of ousting a foreign rule, adopts a traditional form, imitative of reality.

But his personal situation, the conflict between orthodoxy and nationalism, impedes the development of characters and their role in the destruction of *Kanthapura's* archaic existence. He is unable to indicate the contribution of the orthodox brahmans to the tragedy of annihilation nor is he prepared to assert his identification in unequivocal terms with his hero Moorthy, who finally leans towards the even more radical politics of socialism and plunges into the reality of time with despair, whereas the grandmother-narrator, the archaic soul of *Kanthapura*, takes refuge in fantasy with hope. *Kanthapura* may not be perfect, but it is undoubtedly a remarkable achievement in the close approximation of thought and technique, in the attempt, however flawed, to build a structure.

In *The Serpent and the Rope*, there is a determined endeavour to restore the balance which was snapped in *Kanthapura*, to rear-range different elements in a more orderly structure which is conceived as a far more ambitious plan. The concern with Time which as social and political content dominated *Kanthapura's* fictional world and disrupted the orthodox Hindu life is now presented at two levels, in the psychological entanglement of a triangular man-woman relationship as well as in the historical thesis the hero is engaged in. The brahmanic orthodoxy, deeply rooted in the author and not assimilated in the contemporary context, changes into an idea, a grand metaphysic of identity, equating Truth with Orthodoxy which is stripped of its socio-economic implication and presented as a basic attitude to life in conceptual terms. Gandhian humanism, one of the mainsprings of Indian nationalism, is diffused into a generalization—an approach to life which is humanistic in quintessence. In the rejection of the Christian-Buddhist French wife of the brahman Ramaswamy, the pendulum that earlier tilted towards humanism in *Kanthapura* swings to the other extreme of rigid and uncompromising orthodoxy.

In consonance with this gradual transformation of content into abstraction, the mode of *The Serpent and the Rope* develops from *Kanthapura's* socio-political realism into a psychological variant of the distinctly romantic type because it utilizes abstract thought in the methodology of the novel to distance and defamiliarize the mundane and hackneyed reality of an extramarital set-up. The mingling of love and quest in the plot functions as the ground for the display of intellectual acrobatics playing with parallels and analogies from an intensely subjective interpretation of history with a fixed goal of Transcendental Reality as Truth. But the journey to this destination is through a pattern of human relationship which is distinctly existential in its dependence on interaction with the Other.

The whole narrative structure is phenomenal whereas the ideal of the Indian identity lies in the Truth beyond the phenomenon of appearance. Here is the fullest expression of the original disjunction in the self, now developed into an acute crisis which divides the philosopher painfully from the artist. Although the thesis proclaims the triumph of the transcendent ideal, the narrative technique follows all the rules of the phenomenal game of the Western tradition in fiction. At this stage one is convinced that what Rao poses to reject as "Western" (historical, romantic, personal, poetic) is actually as much a part of his own self as the ostensibly applauded "Indian" (traditional, classical, impersonal, antipoetic). The ambiguity inherent in the very notion and experience of self is revealed in the elaborate linguistic structure which is traditional in the conven-tional manipulation of local colour and modernist in the bold use of deviances.

By a careful collocation of a particular class of words, Rao tries to extend the experimental at the semantic level. On the other hand there is a distinct exploitation of the poetic mode in the utilization of rhetoric, linguistic recurrences with a strong symbolic overtone in the form of distinct motifs emerging from the context. The unifying principle which coheres such diverse aspects lies in the metonymic association which progresses syntagmatically and, according to the structuralist poetics constitutes the basis of the realistic mode. Since the avowed object of the Indian novelist is to reject Time and the West, this dependence on the realistic mode is by itself a piece of irony which is further strengthened by the almost incessant eclecticism drawing heavily on the West, especially French literature a feature which irrevocably binds the form to personal biography, consequently to history and time.

From the inter-relation among the different elements therefore, no assertive meaning, either positive or negative, can emerge. This deep seated impasse is responsible for the tension inherent in the form which constantly puts the fictional reality to test. The idealization of the protagonist-narrator, who is a scarcely-veiled projection of the author, combined with a mass of generalizations, often aphoristic with strong prescriptive flavour, deals perhaps the most damaging blow to the fictional texture which, despite the wealth of symbols and images, is constantly rent with holes of authorial intrusion. The discrepancy between the thesis and the human situation highlights the unreliability of the narrator. This ambiguity in the relation between the author and the narrator culminates into straining the very boundary of fiction when the characters themselves assume independence and act out mythical roles consciously without any seeming authorial control.

The interior monologue in which the whole story is presented, instead of revealing, conceals the complexities at the depth of the psyche. There is thus in this novel an acute problem of form, corresponding to the intense crisis in the pattern of thought, resulting in an uncertainty, in placing the dominant—the thesis tries to distort the narrated reality; the style challenges the thesis; the narrative technique, as though in desperation, turns on itself. *The Serpent and the Rope* is a record of the deepening crisis in the artist whose problematic relation with Time now assumes a magnitude that simply clamours for an explosive expression. The language therefore constitutes finally the dominant in the total structure, because the artist cannot establish himself anywhere else, neither in the horns of the intellectual dilemma of two attitudes to life, orthodox and humanist, nor in the traditional modem poetics of fiction which cannot correlate the thesis.

It is therefore inevitable that in the next work, *The Cat and Shakespeare*, there is a desperate attempt to stabilize at an equilibrium related as well as distant from polarized opposition. In order to come to terms with Time, Rao at last turns away from the traditional-modernist form to an allegorical mode which can hold representation and intellectual preoccupation in a balance. The much-sought-for synthesis between orthodox values presented as Truth or Wisdom and the humanism felt to be essentially moralistic and Western, is achieved by turning both into pure conceptual patterns realized as symbols, some of which are traditional and others personal.

Here we can identify a distinct, recognizable configuration in Rao's relation to reality which, since his inability to assimilate brahmanism with Indian nationalism in *Kanthapura*, tends towards a persistent equivocation. In *The Serpent and the Rope*. Buddhism serves as a scapegoat to bear the thrust directed towards Western humanism which is centred in Christianity. In *The Cat and Shakespeare* we find the same equivocation, but attuned here to acceptance, to a positive affirmation. In the symbol of kitten-and-Mother-Cat, indicative of a total surrender to faith which may fallon the undeserving, we find an acceptance of the basic humane core of Christianity.

Since grace is feminine and the mother cat conveys the creative and sustaining values of life, there is an assertion of the reality of this earth. Rao's metaphysics of Truth as Transcendental Reality or Absolute Consciousness has to seek expression in a private symbol of *Shakespeare* who as an artist is a creator and in his negative capability is beyond the relative existence of the world which is like a ration-shop, ruled by scales. This cross-cultural stasis is typical of Rao in his maturity as an artist; so the ostensibly Indian symbol derived from a minor subgenre of one particular system of Vedanta serves as a means to approximate the West, whereas the obviously Western symbol, *Shakespeare*, is built into the structure as a symbol of another system of Vedanta. Both Cat and Shakespeare mean what they are apparently not, or, to put it another way, they are meant to suggest far more than the normal connotation can *logically* conceive of.

The fact that the two different systems of Vedanta that are utilized here are considered to be mutually exclusive in Indian thought lends the technique in the novel the utmost importance for it has to present in a coherent whole a synthesis which is based on rejection of logic. In the process it grows into a unique technique in the manipulation of surreal poetics, mixing dream and reality. The rejection of rationality presupposes a rebellion against the traditional form of the novel controlled by causality, and *The Cat and Shakespeare* anticipates the post-modernist fiction as a consequence. There are however two important conclusions that emerge at this stage. Rao can effect a synthesis only by a radical reduction of the complex problem of contingency into a simplified abstract form of either/or-*to-be* or *not-to-be*. The content therefore tends to become more and more formalized. This leads to the second finding, the gradual diminution of the narrative as well as of characterization, the former approaching to a crystalline symbol, the latter to typification. As a consequence, form depends almost entirely on language to present a symbolic mode. But the linguistic structure does not appear to revel in that kind of baroque luxuriousness which is so much admired in the purple patches of *The Serpent and the Rope*. It is the gradual desiccation of ostensible poeticism in Rao's mature style that finally points to the truth of his situation as an exile.

From *Kanthapura* to *Comrade Kirillov*, an interesting patten of evolution is evident in Rao's handling of the English language. In the first two stages he is deeply immersed in the creative potential of the linguistic experience. His emphasis, at the early stages, falls largely on a type of innovation at the lexical level which usually offers an artist the greatest freedom and is also regarded generally attuned to the realistic convention of the traditional modernist novel. At the same time his desire to utilize the poetic dimension of the English language is revealed in his frequent use of rhetorical devices. The vocabulary is therefore replete with both colloquialism and archaism, not to speak of his obsession with the figures of sound, notably alliteration.

The interaction of tow opposed tendencies produces a pattern which is charlatanistic of *Kanthapura-an* incessant repetition of the regular structure—subject-verb-object/complement, predominant in speech, which is frequently punctured by the essentially literary and formal device of inversion in long units of paragraphs. A simultaneous emphasis on the realistic and the poetic, the colloquial and the formal brings out the inherent opposition because these are not placed in an hierarchy of order. So the quest of the author starts with an attempt to bring together disparate elements and to utilize a definite model for his prose.

The growing maturity of Rao as an artist is instantly marked in *The Serpent and the Rope* where the opposition between elements is reduced or muted with the help of a stylistic model from a great European tradition. The linguistic realism so dominant in the portrayal of daily life in *Kanthapura* is now employed in a much larger as well as deeper connotation, for, the direct borrowings from the French, the sprinkling of Indian words and unusual frequency of certain English words related to inner life produce altogether an atmosphere, exotic and spiritual.

This does not therefore ostensibly conflict with the use of literary devices at every level of the total construct vocabulary, syntax and imagery. The poetic devices too reveal a greater mastery over the English literary tradition in the sensitive manipulation of rhythm, combined with a whole paraphernalia of rhetoric—synaesthesia, inversion, parallel construction, repetition, in syntax and vocabulary from which quite often emerge strong and definite symbolic motifs. The irony lies in this very excellence, this successful assimilation of the Western tradition by an Indian since the theme of *The Serpent and the Rope* is the eternal opposition between the "metaphysical" India of the non-dualist Raja Rao and the "poetic" West of Christ, the rock on which the brahman Ramaswamy's marriage with the Christian Madeleine flounders. So an analysis of the interrelation between the narrative strategy and the language structure reveals an impasse without any hope of resolution leading ultimately to an ambivalence which the heavy stylization constantly tends to underline.

A break-through from this stylized convention bordering perhaps on preciosity is attempted in *The Cat and Shakespeare*.

The mature Rao, who admittedly ends his quest here, emerges with' a simple, amodal style, free from heavy rhetoric and the consequent bond to any specific literary tradition. It is here that we at last find a conscious operation of an order; colloquial and literary devices—residue of former experiments — are graded in a clear authorial perspective. Thus the literary device of inversion here does not conflict violently with the predominant regular pattern for the latter is not exactly colloquial, but rather devoid of any recognizable literary association in its pervasive over-simplification. Foregrounded against the predominant amodal texture, inversion therefore produces a touch of humour or gravity depending on the context.

As a conscious artist, Rao here delves deeper into the language structure insofar as he gradually discards the obvious effusion of creativity found at the lexis of the preceding novels and concentrates on a sparing use of experiment and that too, in syntax. In *The Cat and Shakespeare*, there is a single deviation which is repeated-the scarcely perceptible and yet deliberate omission of the definite article to establish the unity of the particular with the universal. Yet this singular innovation occupies a central position in the total structure of the novel which reaches conclusion in the revelation of Truth in the universal as the Form. But the weight of the various symbolic connotations of ordinary English words de-rived from a subjective and exclusive belief-a composite of heterogeneous elements bordering on mysticism-forces the language into a hermetic system, distant from the world of human communication.

So in *Comrade Kirillov* we find the inevitable consequence, an artist devaluing his own art in a virulent parody of his own former styles. The whole attention is shifted from vocabulary to syntax, repeating a conditional pattern so that the fictionality of the fiction is exposed and the author abjures the authorial omniscience and joins the characters of his own creation. The crystalline world of *The Cat and Shakespeare* resisting communication leads to a reductive rage at meaning in *Comrade Kirillov,* when a linguistic statement uttered in a historical situation evaporates as nothing but a series of "physico-chemical vibration in ether." Language is no longer the very stuff of literary creation, but the prison shutting the Indian writer in English from the reality of human existence. It is therefore inevitable that the most vocal expounders of the "Indian" identity of Raja Rao's works cannot compare Rao with any ancient, medieval or modem writers of this subcontinent and thus seem to acknowledge, perhaps unwittingly, the truth that the very medium of English binds the artist in Rao forever to the literary tradition of the West.

In his attempt to forge a distinct "Indian" identity, equated with a metaphysical rejection of reality, Rao realizes that he is being enmeshed more and more in the West, not only in the "realistic" tradition of the novel form, but also in the poetic convention inseparable from a linguistic system. His whole endeavour is there-fore to construct an enclosed self-sufficient system of his own. So, in *Kanthapura* and *The Serpent and the Rope* his form tends towards expansion, from *The Cat and Shakespeare,* it starts to contract, so that from now on the movement of his thought as well as his literary form may be placed and evaluated not against any particular *national* tradition but against the background of his own former works.

It has to be borne in mind that there is no fundamental disruption which may suggest erratic performance, but a totally comprehensible development. The attempt to pass from the representational to the illustrative in Rao is marked not so much by an apprehension of greater truth or permanent values, but by a change in the compositional elements which are present in the former realistic mode at perhaps a lower level of intensity than these are in the mature form that has now evolved. In other words, there is a gradual shift of the dominant in the successive works.

In *The Cat and Shakespeare* the surreal technique fuses form into style-a unique formal achievement. But surrealism which is here the technique of the allegorical mode has always been present in Rao's former works which are otherwise attuned to traditional realism. In *Kanthapura,* we have the surreal in the description of the festival of Kartika lights when gods and men mingle in the streets of the village and in the mystic experience of Moorthy when the solid reality of the external world seems to melt in his meditation. In *The Serpent and the Rope,* surrealism pervades Benares and the other world of Madeleine so strangely and so strongly evoked in sights and sounds.

Finally, in *The Cat and Shakespeare,* surrealism assumes dominance in the easy exchange between the actual and the fantastic, in the macabre humour playing with thought, and turns the fictional reality into a dream-like fluidity. This gradual domi-nance of surrealism does not by any means completely shatter the realistic mode, although it definitely supports the symbolic. Surrealism, we must remember, is *not* a substitution of reality by tran-scendence, but an extension of its frontier. In the dependence on the personal and the visionary, Rao's allegorical mode with surreal poetics finally emerges as an intensification of realism. It is therefore inevitable that the synthesis achieved in *The Cat and Shakespeare* should be a surreal *point,* a delicate balance, a momentary freeze in Rao's tight rope walking along the realistic mode of the novel. The growing desperation of the artist who is unable to accept his own art in the light of his philosophy, leads him ultimately to a gesture of self-annihilation.

So in *Comrade Kirillov* we find the novelist baring himself in his task as an artist. The apparent abrogation of form Rao has so far used-the socio-political realistic mode of *Kanthapura,* the worship of orthodoxy and pragmatism in the sentimental romanticism of *The Serpent and the Rope* and finally in the allegory of Kanyakumari remains the residue of *The Cat and Shakespeare.* All the basic elements of Rao's thought are present here, Gandhian ideology, Vedanta, Buddhism, Marxism in terms of a professed polarity which is totally deceptive because the identity in focus is a perpetual enigma, participating in both sides. Yet *Comrade Kirillov* is not a mere repetition, but a stage in the developmental process. Combining intellectual content with representational mode in symbols derived from Dostoevsky's famous double, Kirillov and Shatov, it marks an evolution in the allegorical form of *The Cat and Shakespeare.* Indeed the black humour of the preceding novel becomes the dominant in a violent satire on self which is not adequately set off by the serenity of the end in the legend of India.

The prevalence of heavy parody signifying complete dissociation of the author from the discourse serves as an antipode of the positive affirmation in *The Cat and Shakespeare.* The synthesis between Hindu orthodoxy and Western humanism which was so delicately held in a balance is totally shattered as "Western" Marxism is supposed to be incorrigibly alien to "Indian" spirituality. That the concept of India now seems sufficiently humanistic to include both Gandhi and Buddha rejected earlier by Rao's own rigid orthodoxy adds only to the deepest self-alienation. The spirit of negation has the most immediate effect on language which is reduced to mere husk, a *form* without content or meaning since the reality is permanently beyond comprehension. In a professed combination of the ancient Indian theory of *sphota* (the Word Principle) with the physicist view of language supposedly Marxist, the author presents an interpretation of Stalin's congratulatory telegram to Hitler as nothing but "some seventeen hundred wave-components." This violence against logic and the very basic of human communication marks the final mutation of Rao's surreal anti-rationality exhaling an almost Dadaist rage.

The very fact that *Comrade Kirillov* succeeds *The Cat and Shakespeare* proves that there cannot be a permanent resolution of the struggle that goes on in the soul of the author because he is alienated ultimately from himself. Raja Rao started his literary career as a romantic with a typical disjunction with the surrounding reality of India the debased brahmanism as well as the new anglicized vulgarity. In his first two novels, he follows the very authentic tactics of Western realism, that of opposition between appearance and reality, ideal and achievement, great expectations and lost illusion. It is perhaps ironical that these two novels which incorporate the Western traditional poetics of fiction so plainly are dearly cherished by his admirers as profoundly "Indian."

The relative lack of enthusiasm over his later works indicate how pathetic is the whole fallacy of "Indianness" in the concept of the Indian novel in English, for Rao's "Indiannness" is no less a controlling force in the later works than it is in the beginning. Besides, it is basically the same romantic aesthetic with which he starts, that leads him irrevocably to the later experiments. The sovereignty of symbols over representation or imitation is derived very much from Romanticism, in the quest for transcendence "when one is not one, but the 'I'. "The modernist nature of *The Serpent and the Rope* in linguistic experiments is only a desperate mask for the pervading melancholy at the failure to attain transcendence and leads to the later postrnodernist endeavours which question reality and turn the aesthetic order into provisional and relative. Just as the Byronic romantic spleen supplements the visionary ecstasy of Blake, self-contempt alternates with Narcissism in Rao's works. *Comrade Kirillov's* violent self-abasement is therefore inevitable, the logical culmination of the self-adoration in *The Serpent" and the Rope* it is only in *The Cat and Shakespeare* that the obsession with self transmutes into the negative capability which is the primary principle of formal perfection. So the blessing of the Lord falls on Ramkrishna Pai who does not claim to be Indian or spiritual, he is "just a man."

We may find in this evolution of the form of the novel a distinct Western pattern of development—traditional, modem, postmodern, opening toward futuristic novelties. What characterizes Rao is his radical obsession with the construction of an enclosed system of his own in which his works are so intimately related with each other that his later works are actually incompre-hensible without the background of his earlier novels. Thus the whole satiric form of *Comrade Kirillov* is dependent on each of his preceding creations. The pattern of this kind of development is not exactly linear progression opening out in new untrodden space along the horizontal, but tends to be circular, revolving round the same axis of the divided self of an orthodox humanist, a conservative rebel, which expressed its dichotomy in the very first novel *Kanthapura* (1938) and remains the basic core in *Comrade Kirillov* (1976). With this fixed centre, the evolution of the artist as thinker from one novel to another is marked in concentric patterns growing into successively inclusive circles, so that the predecessor is always contained in the successor, but in a new form.

One may find it assimilative or accumulative in its spiral nature. On the other hand, the style develops, from *The Serpent and the Rope* onwards, in the opposite direction, that is, of gradual exclusion of the former freedom of experiments, a marked denudation of poetic exuberance in an attempt to disconnect links with an alien literary tradition irrevocably connected with a linguistic system. Its nature is to dis-card, to renounce. It will not perhaps be unreasonable to read in these two tendencies, the modern Indian intellectual's ambivalence towards the West, his perpetual oscillation between a natural desire to accept the inevitable and an atavistic urge to reject the alien. In the interrelation between the development of thought and expression there is thus an acute tension which becomes permanent in the mature Rao.

As a result, one finds a growing concentration on abstraction, of content transforming into form until his very theme of the "Indian" identity, the magnificent obsession, ends as the very form of a stone idol in *Comrade Kirillov* realized in a deceptively simple style charged with concentrated personal reference. Indeed in Rao's typical utterance—singular not only as a deviance but also as a recurrent pattern, "I saw my eyes see that I saw" or "eyes seeing eyes seeing" we may find his whole artistic form represented in a crystalline symbol of involution centred in self which utilizes the simplest of English words to express perhaps an intensely personal meaning. That the sentence derives its stylistic echo from Paul Valery, as we have seen, may perhaps suggest the final judgement on an Indian novelist in English whose first and foremost concern is to establish an "Indian" identity.

If this thesis can suggest a lesson or a moral, it surely is this that the very concept of identity for an Indian writer in English is dependent on his definition of the West. Among all our writers, it is perhaps Raja Rao who places greatest emphasis on "Indianness." yet it is in his evolution as an artist that India fails to emerge as clearly outlined construct of harmony which may form the still centre of a being tossed in the perpetual flux of time. In *The Serpent and the Rope,* Rao's concept of Indian identity is impersonal, amoral and agnostic; in *Comrade Kirillov* the same Indian self is conceived as personal, moralistic and even faintly theistic with its "Godward beckonings." This mercurial shifting from one pole to another is propelled by the author's varying definition of the West which is personal, moral and Christian in the former and impersonal, amoral and Marxist in the latter, Unless the back-ground of the West is constantly in view, the quest for an "Indian" identity seems to become meaningless.

It therefore follows that such a writer faces the threat of self-annihilation if he is obsessed with an "Indian" identity based on a Hegelian dialectic of opposition between India and West To establish oneself by proving what one is not is a blind alley for the artist in him because the attempt, however noble in nationalist fervour, rich with existential over-tone, dangerously lies about the inextricable and living bond between language, literary tradition, and a whole ethos. The elasticity of English has generously accepted exiles from other languages but has never perhaps established a literary heritage opposed to the West. However singular may have been the stylistic nuances of American or Australian varieties of English, the literatures produced in the United States and Australia are more closely attuned to the literary tradition of English and to the whole Western culture than it can conceivably be to the Chinese or even Arabic, so near home.

It may not be totally irrelevant here to mention the role of religion as the stasis of a whole ethos. Whether Christianity is practised or not, it is still the foundation of the modem Western mind which facilitates cultural exchanges among members of the same ethos in fruitful possibilities without seriously undermining harmony in individual identity. Han Suyin, who writes in English to prove her Chinese identity, admits: "Asians like myself belonging to a small 'upperclass' are intellectual Eurasians. We are all brought up between two worlds." For a Christian with a Chinese father and Belgian mother, the term "Eurasian" seems acceptable (although as a writer Han Suyin prefers to use her Chinese name to the original Eurasian one), but for a proud brahman like Raja Rao with a centruries-old family tradition in brahmanic orthodoxy of exclusiveness as a holy burden, such a designation would simply be intolerable. Neither the historical context of Western colonization nor the Hindu horror of pollution favours an admission of mixture even at an intellectual level.

The problem of identity for a Hindu magnifies itself for another inexplicable mystery the intimate relation between the Indian soil and the Hindu roots which stubbornly refuse transplantation anywhere else in the world. Indeed "Hindu" tends to be a geographical concept which seeks to disregard time. So *the Mahabharata* points out that a happy Hindu is one who is never an exile. The fear of extinction strikes a modem Hindu, who has chosen the west, with an atavistic force, which seeks desperately to resist the undeniable impact of what is assumed to be an alien culture. This complex love-hate syndrome is particularly noticeable in a generation of Indians belonging to a privileged class with sophisticated Western academic background and nationalist aspiration—a class of which Raja Rao may appear as a representative.

If we remember Claude Levi-Strauss's triadic concept of communication in society consisting of exchange of message, service and women, the brahman Raja Rao's whole communication with reality may be found entirely directed towards the West in his irrevocable choice of English as the medium of expression, in his half-a-century stay in the West which provides him his living as well as his three wives. In this situation, the desperate urge for a specific "Indian" identity in English fiction acquires a romantic halo of heroism which ends perhaps in martyrdom. It is because Rao equates Indian identity with uncompromising non-dualism, his rejection of reality inevitably progresses towards the annihilation of the form of the novel which centres in pluralism and acceptance of reality. His attempt at a synthesis is achieved at such a cost of human concern and rationality, it emerges so very unique and individual that the author seems gradually lost in a labyrinth of self from which there is no exit.

The aggressive flaunting of Hindu spirituality, Sanskrit words (often in careless and atrocious transliteration), esoteric doctrines which lie buried in oblivion among the Hindus themselves, are all nothing but magnified reverberation of the clanking chain, the most tragic proof of self-imprisonment. For an artist who is astride two worlds, the quest for form can reach the harmony of conclusion only when the duality between India and the West is resolved. Yet the irony is, for such a writer it is precisely this duality, this tension which is the source and spring of his whole creativity.

The structural pattern of this creativity is basically non Indian for, it rests on the principle of opposition which has dominated the Western mind producing heresies, Inquisitions, Pogroms, Moscow Trials and Concentration Camps. This attitude leads to an emphasis on the difference between India and the West. Although Advaita is one among many schools of Vedanta, and Vedanta is only one of the six major systems that comprise the orthodox branch of Hindu thought, yet it has received an overblown importance in the Western intellectual preoccupation with India because the concept of the non-duality between the attributeless.

Absolute Consciousness and the individual offers the greatest possible contrast to the Christian West which believes in a personal God and in the existence of the individual in his own right at a level qualitatively different from the Divine. It is because Rao seeks an "Indian" identity in English and his works are addressed to the West that the socio-linguistic dimension of the novel-form defines the very pattern of his creativity and ultimately imprisons the artist in a simplistic "Indian" image which is to a large extent superimposed by the West on our complex reality. The desperate attempt at a breakthrough, for a true synthesis, hardly succeeds in modifying the original theoretical stand: "Duality is anti-Indian, the non-dual affirms the truth." The basic *either-or* principle establishes Rao's "Indian" identity once for all to his Western readers for whom he writes, obliterating the Indian truth that this is a stand no Indian thinker or artist has ever struck in the whole course of the history of this sub-continent; because it reduces spirituality to the level of a mere attribute of nationalism, and above all its rigidity denies that core of heterogeneity which is the dominant motif in the vast and variegated Indian culture.

If there is any spiritual essence in the whole corpus of Rabindranath Tagore's writing, it lies according to Tagore himself-in' the life-long endeavour to realize through his total experience "that complete and fulfilled love between the Divine and the human of which duality and non-duality arc the two aspects, one complementing the other." When Raja

Rao declares, "I don't want to compare myself with Kalidasa" or describes himself as "an Indian who wanted to forget Tagore," he is bound to "continue the adventure in lone desperation" as he confesses in the Preface to the *The Policeman and the Rose.* Exile therefore is predestined for Raja Rao, his *karma.* The beautiful rhetoric of his celebrated metaphysic of Indian identity. "India is anywhere and anywhen" will perhaps remain a piece of profound tragic irony. The ideal of transcendence annihilating time and space seeks roots in the temporal and spatial reality and in the intricate pattern of relationship binding language, literature and thought; this reality is not so much Indian as Western confessing the victory of Plato enshrined in an alien linguistic structure, complete with the finishing touch of a modernist poetics. The quest for form therefore goes on because in the very self of the brahman novelist in English, the crisis is perpetual.

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